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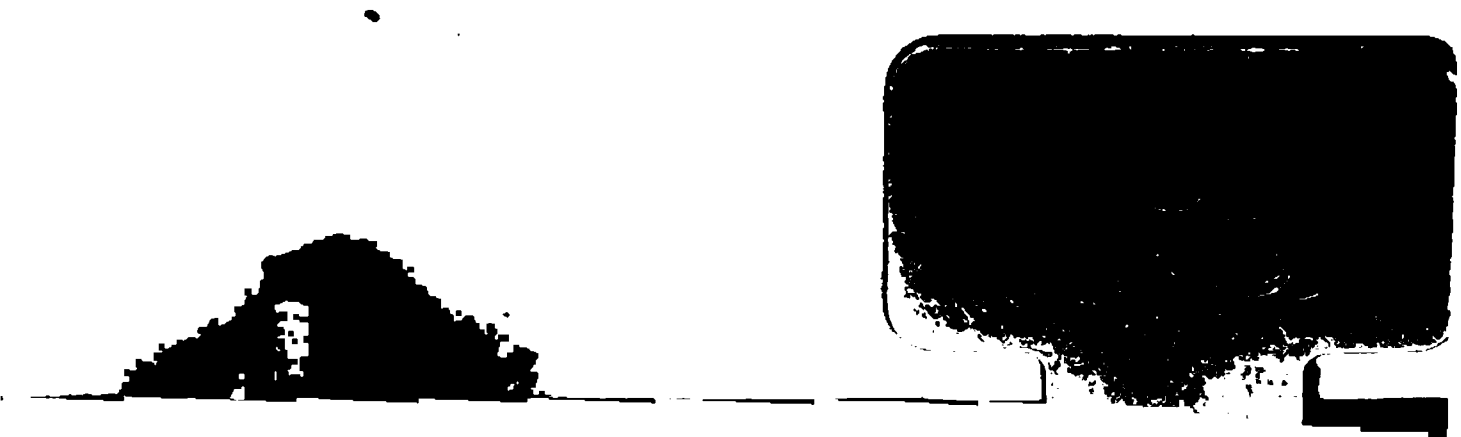

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# SERMONS.

(SECOND SERIES.)

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BY


## JAMES YONGE, M. A.

LATE PERPETUAL CURATE OF THE UNITED PARISHES OF TORMOHAM AND COCKINGTON, IN THE COUNTY OF DEVON; AND FORMERLY MINISTER OF TORQUAY CHAPEL.


DEDICATED TO ALL THE MEMBERS OF HIS CONGREGATION, AS A LAST TOKEN OF HIS AFFECTIONATE REGARD.

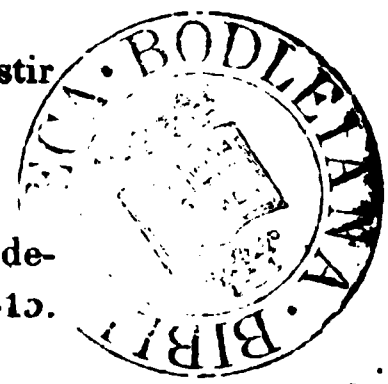
---

"Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.

"Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance;

"Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle.—

"Moreover, I will endeavour that you may be able after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance."—2 *Peter* i. 12—15.

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1832.



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# [illegible]MONS.

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## [illegible] YONGE, M. A.

[illegible] THE UNITED PARISHES OF TORMOHAM AND [illegible] OF DEVON, AND FORMERLY [illegible] TORQUAY CHAPEL.

[illegible] THE MEMBERS OF HIS CONGREGATION, AS A [illegible] OF HIS AFFECTIONATE REGARD.

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[illegible] I will endeavour that you may be able after my [illegible] these things always in remembrance."—2 Peter [illegible]

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# ADVERTISEMENT.

THE former Series of the deceased Author's Sermons has been so favourably received by the Christian public, that but few copies of a somewhat large impression now remain on hand, while a considerable sum of money, the profits of the work, has been remitted, for charitable uses, to the parishes for which it was designed.

These facts will, perhaps, furnish the best apology for the introduction of a new Volume to the attention of the religious world. May this work be blessed by the Divine Giver of all good, to the furtherance of true piety and virtue, and to the praise of His own Most Holy Name.

Not unfrequently, in his life time, was the lamented Author accustomed to remark, that they

who send forth infidel and pernicious publications among men, little think what a progressive accumulation of evil will be going on, by their instrumentality, through a long succession of years, even after they themselves shall have passed off to their account; and it may not be presumptuous, or fanciful, to imagine, that *possibly* no thought is now more afflictive to the souls of such evil advisers, *in the intermediate state*, than the conscious knowledge that they are still, as it were, "adding sin to sin," even while (however much they may desire it) they possess no power to arrest the course of the dreadful responsibility.

If there be any truth in this remark, may we not, on the other hand, indulge the hope that there is an addition of joy among the spirits of the just, arising from the conscious thought, that "their labour is not in vain in the Lord," even after the tongue is silent, and the heart has ceased to beat.

May we, who have ventured on this second undertaking, be found in the last day to have been engaged in a work which, under God, shall

not only have been profitable to the souls of men in " this vale of misery," but such as shall have been permitted to contribute to the spiritual joys of a friend, who, while on earth, was not slothful in his divine master's service ; and who, we trust, will be inseparably united to Him, in his future and glorious kingdom.

The profits of this Volume, if any, will be applied as before.

# CONTENTS.


## SERMON. I.

Page

THE NEW YEAR ..... 1

St. John ix. 4.

*I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work.*

## SERMON II.

GOD AND MAMMON ..... 19

St. Matthew vi. 24.

*No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*

## SERMON III.

THE TRUE GOD AND ETERNAL LIFE ..... 39

St. John xvii. 3.

*And this is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*

## SERMON IV.

Page
THE TRUE GOD AND ETERNAL LIFE ..... 57

ST. JOHN xvii. 3.

*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*

## SERMON V.

THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST ..... ..... 79

1 COR. viii. 5, 6.

*For though there be that are called Gods, whether in heaven, or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,)*

*But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we in him.*

## SERMON VI.

THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST ..... 103

1 COR. xv. 57.

*But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!*

## SERMON VII.

THE LOVE OF GOD ..... 125

DEUT. vi. 5.

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*

## SERMON VIII.

Page
THE LOVE OF GOD ..... 141

DEUT. vi. 5.

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*

## SERMON IX.

SEEKING THE LORD ..... 157

ISAIAH lv. 6, 7.

*Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him, while he is near:*

*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

## SERMON X.

PARDON PROMISED TO FORSAKEN SIN ..... 173

ISAIAH lv. 7.

*Let the wiched forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

## SERMON XI.

Page
PARDON PROMISED TO FORSAKEN SIN ..... 191

**Isaiah lv. 7.**

***Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.***

## SERMON XII.

CONFESSION OF SIN ..... 209

**1 John i. 8, 9.**

***If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us, but if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***

## SERMON XIII.

JUDGE NOT ..... 225

**Romans xiv. 10.**

***But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the Judgment seat of Christ.***

## SERMON XIV.

THE MORTALITY OF MAN ..... 241

**Job xiv. 1, 2.**

***Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.***

***He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.***

## SERMON XV.

Page
TRIBULATION IN THE WORLD ..... 259

**ST. JOHN xvi. 33.**

***In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.***

## SERMON XVI.

HALTING BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS..... 275

**1 KINGS xviii. 21.**

***And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.***

## SERMON XVII.

HALTING BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS..... 295

**1 KINGS xviii. 21.**

***And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal then follow him.***

## SERMON XVIII.

GROWTH IN GRACE ..... 313

**2 PETER iii. 18.**

***Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.***

## SERMON XIX.

Page
GROWTH IN GRACE ..... 335

**2 PETER iii. 18.**

***Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.***

## SERMON XX.

THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD ... ..... 357

**HEBREWS iv. 13.**

***Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.***

## SERMON XXI.

CHRISTIAN HOPE..... ..... 379

**PSALM xxxix. 8.**

***And now, Lord, what is my hope? Truly my hope is even in Thee.***

## SERMON XXII.

CHARITY ..... 397

**1 COR. xiii. 1, 2, 3.**

***Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal;***

***And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing;***

***And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.***

## SERMON XXIII.

Page
REGENERATION ..... 415

**2 Cor. v. 17.**

***If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature;—old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new.***

## SERMON XXIV.

THE LORD'S SUPPER ..... ..... 431

**1 Cor. xi. 28.**

***Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.***

## SERMON XXV.

THE LAST JUDGMENT ..... 453

**Romans xiv. 10.**

***We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.***

# SERMON I.

## THE NEW YEAR.

JOHN ix. 4.

*I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work.*

THE commencement of a new year calls for our serious meditation on a subject of infinite importance—the value of time. For what purpose were we sent into the world? How far have we endeavoured to answer that purpose? What prospect have we in that awful eternity whose gates will soon be unbarred to us by death? Are we working the works of Him who sent us, in this our brief and uncertain day of life? Are we dispatching our business with anxious haste, lest the night in which no man can work overtake us before it be accomplished? Or are we indo-

lently slumbering in the season appointed for wakefulness and activity, or amusing ourselves with idle pleasures, or distracting ourselves with unprofitable pursuits, in the period designed for occupations of the most serious and momentous nature? These are questions of inexpressible interest to us all, for life is fleeting away; the sand which measures our hours, even while yet I speak, is rapidly sinking in the glass; we know not how much may remain, how soon the last grain may steal away and leave it empty; and yet a chain of everlasting consequences hangs on the feeble thread of this momentary existence. If, therefore, my brethren, human life is a condition to which any important duties are attached, if it is a period, of the employment of which any account is to be taken hereafter, if it is to us, not a mere insulated portion of time, lopped off from eternity, complete in itself, and unconnected with the endless duration of succeeding ages, but on the contrary the infancy of an existence, the place and manner of which are soon to be changed, but the continuance never perhaps even to be suspended, if in short men are not mere "Bubbles of a fantastic deity, blown up in sport, rising and breaking, millions in an hour,"* but immortal beings, sent into this school

* Young.

of the world, for the purpose of a short probation, and after they shall have been sufficiently tried, to be adjudged to everlasting happiness or misery according to the characters and tempers which they shall have acquired in this state of discipline; if this be the true intent and explanation of this extraordinary life, of what supreme concernment is it to us to enquire how far we are complying with the merciful purpose of the great author of our being, and whether it is with hope or fear that we can reasonably anticipate that decisive day of judgment which will wind up our accounts for ever, and assign us to an unchangeable futurity! Let us consider then, the serious subjects which I have proposed, and may God of his mercy dispose us to consider them with that reverence and solemnity which are due to their vast importance, so that we may diligently "apply our hearts unto wisdom," and through his assistance reduce to practice, in our future lives, the grand truths on which we are this day called to meditate.

"For what purposes were we sent into the world?" Leave out the sublime doctrine of immortality which our religion teaches us, and this is a question for which neither you nor I can find any probable answer. If we were to confine our views to this life, and entertained no hope of any

thing beyond it, I should be utterly at a loss to imagine the object of our existence; unless indeed it were that we might be a "gazing-stock," and a sport to superior and invisible beings, who might be amused with our strange vagaries, our ridiculous errors, our contemptible self-importance, our abortive efforts at greatness, our eager pursuits of visions and shadows of happiness, our vain affectation of wisdom, our sage discourses about virtue and vice, (both of which would be equally insignificant,) our schemes for perpetuating an empty name, the absurd effects of our irregular passions, and all the other numberless follies which our trifling labours, and cares, and interests would exhibit to their view. Add to all these follies the miseries and pains which men endure, the diseases, the sorrows, the disappointments, the fears, that disturb and ruin the little happiness of which we are capable, and a malicious being, (for there must be some malevolence in the mind which could enjoy so sad a scene) a *malicious* being, I say, might take a cruel pleasure in contemplating this at once laughable and woeful farce of human life, played on a temporary stage, from which the actors, puffed up with imaginary self-importance for a moment, are perpetually retiring, never to appear again; though even to such a being, I should

suppose that the constant succession of similar characters, and similar circumstances, must have rendered the exhibition long since tedious and insipid. I cannot express to you the humiliating sentiments which I entertain, concerning the vanity and emptiness of human life, when viewed without any belief in, or reference to, an eternal existence beyond this present scene: it seems such a medley and patchwork of inconsistencies, as leaves the mind at a loss to discover any connection or harmony in the whole picture, such a mazy labyrinth of errors as no clue can help us to unravel.

But, my brethren, the merciful revelation of God has furnished us with the key which can alone unlock this mystery; the revelation of God has rendered all these intricacies clear and intelligible to us; now all is plain and simple, since our Saviour, Christ, came upon the earth, and brought with him the "glad tidings" of "life and immortality" in another world. And if you ask me now, "what is the purpose of our existence?" it is a question to which I can return a ready and an easy answer. It is, that by approving ourselves sincere worshippers and faithful servants of God, according to the rules of his revealed will, we may hereafter be translated to an everlasting inheritance of happiness and glory.

What an unspeakable interest does this truth attach to this our earthly state, which would otherwise appear so insignificant and even ridiculous! What an important being is every individual of the human race! What a serious part has man to act! Of what immense consequence is the use that he makes of the short time allotted to him here below! How unlike a being is he to that trifling animal, which, under a different supposition, I had represented him to be! Every thing now becomes of moment; all his thoughts, words, and actions, his habits, his character, and his pursuits; they are all matters of the deepest concern. Scarcely any thing is insignificant to him who stands on the narrow boundary between two eternities, between heaven and hell; who must so soon enter into the one or the other, and of whom the utmost circumspection is required, lest he should deviate into the path that leads to ruin. Now he is, not the gazing stock that I formerly described, to beings who might watch with the interest of mere amused spectators, his short-lived frolics and his eccentric wanderings, but a spectacle of God, and of angels, and devils, who observe with anxiety (if I may venture so to speak) the perils by which he is surrounded, and the course which he pursues, of friendly spirits, who assiduously endeavour to direct his feet into

the path of happiness and peace, and of hostile demons, who use all their art and influence to divert him from the right way, and to thrust him into the dreadful abyss of misery and perdition. Only consider, my brethren, in what a condition your birth has placed you, and what an awful responsibility it has entailed upon you! for (I have made the same remark before, but I cannot too often repeat it) either this representation is absolutely true, or religion is nonsense, and not deserving of a serious thought; either it is absolutely true that happiness or misery without end will result from the manner in which you shall spend your day of trial and probation, and then the business of life is a most stupendous concern, or these hopes and fears of eternity are all a fable, and in that case it is immaterial *how* you spend the few years of so useless and valueless an existence.

But I shall address you, not as if I thought you had any doubts on this subject, but as professed believers in the solemn doctrines of the gospel; and as such, I invite and entreat you to take this opportunity of examining whether your practice is consistent with your belief, whether you are so impressed with the conviction that the one grand purpose of life is to prepare for an eternal state, as to make that persuasion a ruling

principle of action, a sentiment which enters into all your views, and exercises a prevailing influence over the general turn of your conduct. For in real truth and sober reason it ought so to be. Do not set this down as mere professional language, belonging peculiarly to the pulpit; for it is the plain language of common sense, which deserves the attention of wise and prudent men, wherever her voice is heard; it is common sense tells you that if you actually believe that you will hereafter have to answer at the bar of God's judgment for the use made of your present lives, the uppermost consideration of your minds ought to be how you may best hope for a favourable sentence on that great day. It is common sense that tells you, that if your portion, either of joy or woe, in another world, is to be eternal and unalterable, and the decision is to depend solely and entirely upon what you shall have been in this your time of trial, then it is the very extreme of folly to let any other subject possess a rival interest in your hearts. Oh! look upon these things as *realities*, and you will embrace the maxims of common sense. What! my brethren, shall the believer in an eternal state think any thing of more importance than to prepare for it? Shall he fall into so senseless an error as to regard the world, through which he is but passing, as his

settled home? its pleasures, as his chief good? its possessions as his richest treasures? its honours, as his highest ambition? its interests, as worthy of his most lively anxiety? And shall heaven the while be either entirely excluded from his view, or (which is quite as bad) occupy but an inferior and secondary place in his affections? Shall earth and its vanities call forth all the energies of his mind, and command his most zealous services, and heaven be but an object of occasional aspirations, of feeble hopes, of luke-warm desires, of languid exertion, of reluctant labours? Are we sent into the world, think you, to be rich, to be great, to be learned, to be finely clothed and sumptuously feasted, to excel in the arts and professions of life, to prosper in business, or to indulge in ease and enjoyment? Alas! how many there are, who begin and end their course with no other views than these! How many there are, who are "careful and troubled about many things," to the neglect of the one great end which alone is needful to be studied, and alone worthy to be attained! How many, who so far from "seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," not even seek them at all, but devote their whole time, and thought, and strength, to subordinate and infinitely less important objects! I speak not now of those whose

vicious and irregular lives consign them at once to that wretched class of men who are altogether "without hope and without God in the world," but of those whose respectable characters, and honest occupations, and innocent diversions, seem not to put a decided barrier between them and heaven, and yet who in real truth have not a more reasonable prospect of its happiness than the others, because they do not aim at it. Their employments may be praiseworthy, may be absolutely necessary, their pleasures not culpable, their virtue unimpeachable, according to human estimation; but suppose that with all this they have actually no solid principles or lively impressions of religion; suppose all their views are earthly, all their desire to succeed in business, to amass a fortune, to acquire a reputation, or to enjoy the easy repose, and the elegant accommodation of polished life; suppose the love of God forms not the ruling principle of their minds; suppose the care of their salvation gives not the bias and direction to their general course of thought, and system of conduct; suppose in short, that they are *only* men of respectability, or only men engaged in useful and laudable occupations, or only men of refined taste and polite manners, and fashionable accomplishments. I will charge them with nothing worse, but suppose

we can attribute to them nothing better, can we grant to these the praise of a religious character? Can we say of them that they are working the works of him that sent them? that they are fulfilling the great purpose for which they were born? that they are striving to enter in at the strait and narrow gate which leadeth unto life? that they are faithful servants of God, sincere disciples of the gospel, hopeful heirs of immortality? Nay, they have applied their precious time to most frivolous uses; they have been extravagant spendthrifts of their valuable lives; and were they to be summoned to judgment now, all their past years would rise up in witness against them, and condemn them. For, although their consciences may not reproach them with wilful transgressions, although they may have been guilty of no excesses, not even of any immoralities and indecencies, although they may have been diligent and faithful in the exercise of their several callings, although calumny may not have had a word to whisper against the general integrity and justice of their dealings, yet I will not hesitate to say, that if religious motives have had nothing to do in influencing their conduct, they have hitherto lived in sin;—for our whole life is but one continued course of sin, however respectable in the eyes of the world, if the love of God,

the desire to please him and do his will, be not the presiding and pervading principle of our conduct. It is this alone which sanctifies our employments, and the very same occupations may be sinful or innocent, according as religious views have furnished the motives by which we have been habitually directed. In this sense, "whatever is not of faith, is sin." For is it not in truth, a perversion and profanation of the name, to call those christians, whose minds have received no impression, and exhibit no feature of christianity? Is it not a mockery of the gospel, to number the mere man of business, and the mere man of pleasure, however free from human censure in their general conduct, among its disciples? To admit them to an equal participation in its privileges? To suppose them equally warranted to entertain the hope of salvation? We need no gospel, if *this* religion will suffice, for then heaven may be attained without repentance, without faith, without prayer, without the love of God and Christ, without christian charity, without humility, without the setting of the affections on things above, without the influence of the Holy Spirit, without self-denial, without conquering the evil inclinations of our corrupt nature, in a word, without believing any of the christian doctrines, or acquiring any of the christian graces. But, my breth-

ren, either the gospel is false, or heaven *cannot* be so attained; for it prescribes all these things as necessary to salvation. Will the merits of the Redeemer, do you suppose, avail to cover, and compensate for, all these deficiencies? He is no Redeemer but to those who believe in him, and love him, and obey him. Alas! how often is his excellent and consoling doctrine, the only hope of the sincere christian, abused by those who want a plea for their carelessness and indolence!

But the doctrine of redemption, in fact, carries with it the strongest obligation, and gives the most forcible impulse, to all the warm emotions and active duties of religion; so far from being a substitute for religion, it is the strongest motive to it; it is because we are "bought with a price," that we are therefore "not our own;" it is because "Christ died for all," that "they which live should (therefore) not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him, which died for them, and rose again;" it is because "God first loved us," that we ought therefore to "love him" in return; it is because "the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men," that we ought therefore to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present evil world; looking for that blessed hope, and

the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us," (not that we might live in unconcern about our salvation, or in neglect of the principles and duties of religion, but) "that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Depend on it, that whoever is a hearty believer in the efficacy of our blessed Saviour's atonement and mediation, that man is not content with merely acknowledging this doctrine, but loves him as his greatest benefactor, confides in him as his firmest friend, attends to him as his best instructor, follows him as his safest guide, and obeys him as his most kind and supreme master.

My brethren, the object of my discourse has been to convince you that religion is the grand business of life, and that those who have not kept that end steadily in view, in whatever way they may have been employed, have wholly wasted their time in pursuits foreign to the purpose for which they were born. And in speaking of the perversion of life's great use, when it is entirely devoted to other occupations, to the *neglect* and *exclusion* of religion, I have designedly addressed myself to those, whose engagements may be of a creditable, or at least not discreditable nature, on this account, because I

suppose that persons who have lived in the state, which we commonly understand by direct and decided sin, cannot, if they ever reflect for a moment, flatter themselves with the thought that *their* lives have not been egregiously and woefully misemployed, whereas those to whom we cannot impute flagrantly vicious conduct, but who have on the contrary led decorous and perhaps useful lives, in a worldly sense, and who have rather lived without religion than in wilful opposition to it, may easily delude themselves with a belief that they cannot be charged with a misuse of that time, which they have so profitably and innocently employed. I hope, if there are any such present, they will begin to entertain different sentiments; I hope they will be brought before it be too late, to a serious and practical conviction of the worthlessness, nay sinfulnes, of every, even the most respectable, pursuit in life, when unconnected with, and disjoined from religious principles and motives. I hope they will yet learn, that man was made to worship and serve God, and to work out his own salvation, that every thing else is but secondary to these most important objects, and that if God is not their chief good, his will their principal study, and heaven their highest aim, the greatest success and the most perfect happiness that they

can attain on earth, is but "vanity and vexation of spirit." And above all things, let me earnestly beseech you not to delay, or propose to take time to consider the matter; say not to conscience, "go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee;" be assured, this is the most convenient season, because God only knows whether he will grant you another; "behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation." The day admonishes you to hasten, the revolving year begins its course anew, let *your* new course begin with it. I say to each of you, as the prophet said to Hezekiah, "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live." I say it with no prophetic spirit, for you all know as well as myself, that the event is certain, nor can you, with that king, by prayer obtain an assurance from God that your life shall be prolonged; it may very soon come to a close; much time has been already wasted, and can never be recalled; little may remain, but however much, the whole is so much the more due to God, and to the welfare of your own souls, because both have been hitherto neglected. Oh! be as merciful to yourselves, as God is merciful to you, in vouchsafing you the opportunity of repentance and amendment, and you will, through his gracious help, henceforth so "num-

ber your days, as to apply your hearts unto wisdom."

Most merciful God, teach us all that true wisdom of devoting our whole hearts, and strength, and time, to thy glory, and to the serious work of our own salvation, and when thou shalt think fit to conclude this our short day of trial, take us, we beseech thee, to thine everlasting kingdom, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our only Saviour and Redeemer. *Amen.*

# SERMON II.

## GOD AND MAMMON.

MATT. vi. 24.

*No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*

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It is our blessed Saviour's express and positive assertion, that "a man cannot serve two masters," cannot be faithful to both: that, if he loves and is attached to the one, he will necessarily hate and disregard the other. This requires a little explanation. For why might there not be two persons, so united in the bonds of friendship, so agreeing with each other in sentiment and purpose, that the same individual might be able to serve them both? Why might not their wishes be in many cases the same, and

therefore the obedience which is rendered to the one, be effectual to promote the views of the other? And if they should at any time have separate designs to execute, why might they not mutually accommodate each other, by suffering their common servant occasionally to employ himself about their distinct concerns?

It is plain therefore that this is not the sort of case which our Saviour had in contemplation; he must have meant that no man can serve two masters, whose characters, and dispositions, and purposes are *opposed* to each other, and each of whom requires a faithful, undivided service; for whatever he should do for the one must of necessity be contrary to the wishes of the other; it would be impossible to please them both; it would be equally impossible for him to esteem them both with an equal affection; he must give a preference to one, and, in obeying him, he cannot avoid the consequence of disobeying the other.

This is clear enough; you cannot fail to acknowledge the truth of the general remark; it is impossible to serve, or to love two such masters; the authority of the one must be shaken off, and his interests neglected, if a ready obedience and faithful devotion be exhibited towards the other. But now for the particular application of

this self-evident maxim. Is the fact, manifest as it may be, of any importance to us? Are we so situated with respect to the demands of any two persons claiming to be our masters, as to be under the necessity of coming to a decision between them, and of choosing whom we will serve? Our Saviour implies that this is the case with all the world, when he says "ye cannot serve God and mammon." Consider then, who God and mammon are, and what services they require, that you may learn whether both can be served together, and if not, which has the best title to your preference?

My brethren, this question would soon be settled, if you could once be persuaded to reflect seriously who God is, and what claims he has upon you. For, whom or what could you deliberately put in competition with the almighty creator and governor of the world, to whom you owe your original formation, your preservation to this hour, your existence at the present moment, every power you possess, every good thing you have ever enjoyed, upon whose bounty, in short, you are entirely dependent, even if you look no further than this life? "for in him we live, and move, and have our being."

If you did but consider how absolutely you are at the disposal of God, how his providence

directs all events, how vain all human schemes and endeavours are, if his blessing is withheld from them, you would acknowledge that, even in temporal matters, it would be imprudent and unsafe to obey any other God but him, to follow any other rule than such as he approves. How much more forcible then is the reason for attaching yourselves to God alone, when you extend your views to a future world! Upon the desertion of some of his followers, Christ once asked his twelve disciples, "Will ye also go away? "Lord," they replied, "to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." Sufficient ground, assuredly, for preferring him above every other master. These were reasonable men, and well had they considered that if they should be able "to gain the whole world," in any other service, they would make a most unprofitable exchange. Deeply and seriously (no doubt) had *they* weighed the consequences of forsaking all and following Christ, and readily did they deny themselves, and take up their cross daily, and follow him, "counting all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord, by whom the world was crucified unto them, and they unto the world;" for they knew that whatever sacrifice they might make of earthly interests, they would be abundantly re-

compensed by that which they had in prospect, the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, reserved for the heirs of salvation. And how can *you* judge otherwise? How can you hesitate for a moment what decision to make, when you weigh heaven and earth in opposite scales? But this is not all; still more cause is there for saying "Lord, to whom shall we go?" when you add the consideration that the same being who "has the words of eternal life," has also the words of eternal death, and that there is no escape from his vengeance, if you neglect the great salvation which he hath so mercifully made known to you; so that whether you look upon God as your creator, your preserver, your redeemer, your future judge, prepared to execute vengeance on all who obey not the gospel of his son Jesus Christ; whether you consider the sovereign power he possesses over you, the strong claims he has to your love and gratitude, the good things which he promises to those who serve him, the dreadful evils which he threatens to those who despise him, here is enough to determine you at once in choosing *him* for your sole master, by whatever title any other may demand your obedience.

But who *is* this other master, who desires to have rule over us, and to whom so many un-

happy persons, to their own ruin, as well as to the dishonour of God, "yield themselves servants to obey?" "Mammon" is the name which our Saviour uses; it is a word properly signifying "riches." The Greeks and Romans had their God of wealth, and very probably the idolatrous nations of Canaan worshipped some imaginary being to whom they attributed the same character under the name of Mammon; at all events, our Saviour uses the word in this place, as if he were speaking of a *person*, of one who proposed himself as a master of the world; and what he says applies as truly to every other earthly object of trust or confidence as to riches; therefore I shall not scruple, for the sake of my present argument, to employ another name, common enough in the Scriptures, and the use of which will not alter the nature of the question which we have to decide, but rather exhibit it in its true light and full extent; I mean the name of him, who is no fancied being, no mere ideal personification of some worldly object, but a real existing spirit, the actual God of this world, worshipped, or at least served, and that most faithfully and zealously, by multitudes of deluded followers in preference to the God of heaven and earth; no other than Satan, the deceiver, the destroyer, the prince of the power of the air, the enemy, the

wicked one, the devil (or accuser) "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." This is the master whom you must choose if you reject God, you have no other alternative, the Scriptures plainly declare you to be so circumstanced. He it was, who first introduced rebellion, with all its consequent evils, into the world; he was the cause of man's unhappy fall from innocence. Christ came into the world to destroy and undo *his* works; he assumed flesh and blood and died upon the cross, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is to say, the devil. Satan, by his artful temptations, endeavoured to counteract and defeat this gracious purpose, proposing *himself* as the object of religious worship; —it is the devil who taketh away the seed of the gospel, out of the hearts of careless hearers, who soweth tares among the wheat, who "blindeth the eyes of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." We are exhorted to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, and to put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil; to take the shield of faith, that we may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one; to be sober and vigilant, be-

cause our adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour." Those who commit sin are called the children of the devil; those who are converted to the faith and obedience of the gospel, are said to be "turned from darkness unto light, from the power of satan unto God:" finally, the wicked are to have their portion hereafter in a place of punishment, expressly prepared for the devil and his angels. Thus I have proved to you from the holy Scriptures, that I use no unwarrantable liberty in substituting the name of satan for that of mammon; understand mammon to mean riches or any other earthly object of desire, or the world in general, as opposed to the kingdom of God and his righteousness, still satan is the real master, these are only the allurements and temptations which he makes use of to seduce men into his service. Not that he can bestow them, he can only direct your attention to them, tempt you to set your heart upon them, inflame your desire after them, magnify the value and the pleasure of them, blind your eyes to the danger of them; this is as far as his power goes. But he knows that if he can succeed in this, he plunges you into guilt and ruin, robs Christ of souls whom he came to redeem, and secures for himself associates in his own eternal misery.

Such then are the "two masters" who claim the dominion of the world;—What are the services which they require?

God demands the supreme place in your affections; "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." He says (Christ, who is the image of God, says) "he that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me;" that is, *no* object, not even such as may otherwise innocently be loved, not even such as has by nature and divine institution the strongest and best founded title to our esteem, must be suffered to come into competition with God. Again, the Scripture says "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world, if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Here *all* earthly objects are at once excluded from having any such share in our affections, as to interfere with the love of God; as they are also in the other passage which bids us "set our affections on things above, not on things on the earth." But I need not accumulate texts on this subject; it is enough to state that the spirit of the first and great commandment breathes through the whole of the sacred writings. We

must worship the Lord our God, and him only must we serve. His will is to be our only rule; his favour our highest object; the kingdom of God and his righteousness our first and most important aim in all the periods and circumstances of life; no matter what difficulty may impede, what labour, what sacrifice of natural inclination, what self-denial may be required; every desire, every pursuit must yield to the love of God, if we take him for our master.

I have said the only other master proposed to our choice is Satan. Disguise this fact as we will, use whatever other expression we please, soften away our opposition to God by any other language, use a milder representation of the condition in which we are living, this is the plain, the alarming truth; our only other claim is to be the servants of satan. And what is his will? What are his laws? The very contrary in all things to those of God. Love the world, study your earthly interests and pleasures, indulge all your appetites, give the rein to all your passions, revel in sensuality, put eternity out of view, be conformed to the world, make a mock of sin, shake off all apprehensions of punishment, neglect the Scriptures, omit prayer, burst your slavish bonds of religion, and live altogether according to the bent of your own corrupt nature,

these are the maxims of Satan, and the laws by which he would govern the world. Can you serve two such masters? Can you obey each of them in *part?* Can you reconcile their discordant principles of government? Can you promote their views with equal fidelity and equal success? Can you love both? Can you please both? Not unless you can confound all distinction between good and evil; not unless you can mingle heaven and hell together; not unless you can find in the Scriptures the promise of some intermediate condition hereafter, between everlasting happiness and everlasting misery; nay, it is utterly impossible, it is a contradiction to suppose it; "for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? And what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" These things are so inconsistent that it is impossible to bring them to any agreement, impossible to find any *neutral* ground between the two parties, on which one may stand, and hold friendly intercourse with both alike.

But does any man attempt it? Is any man so foolish as to think that he can at once engage in two services of such opposite natures? that he *can* serve two masters, such as have been de-

scribed? God and mammon? God and Satan? Oh that we had not numberless proofs of this folly before our eyes every day! Oh that we could see the two services kept so distinct, that there should be no doubt which master every man had chosen! that Christians were such decided characters, so simply devoted to the cause of their Lord, so free from all appearance or suspicion of communion with his enemy, as to create no difficulty in determining to whom they belong! that the line which separates the servants of God from the servants of mammon were as visible as it is real! For we are now greatly perplexed, when we behold in the same persons such a mixture of opposite characters and opposite pursuits. We scarcely know (though God knows) on whose side they are ranged, in whose cause they are engaged; some Christians come down so near to a conformity with the world, and some worldly people put on so much of the appearance of Christians, that the outward distinction seems to be lost in many cases, and we should often be in error, if we were to attempt to class either party by what we see and know of them. It is not indeed that we are required to do this; nay more, it is not that we have any right to do this; often have I observed Christian charity, which "thinketh no evil, and hopeth all things," to

suffer sadly in the attempt. God knoweth the hearts of men; and he alone can tell who are his and who are not; it is not for us to judge concerning our neighbour's condition, except where the case is very palpable and decided; and even then for no other purpose but to pity, and if possible, to reclaim him, and to take a warning for ourselves. But still, since there is so vast a distinction in reality between those who are sincere christians and those who are not, it is doubtless much to be lamented that in outward appearance the distinction is not always to be perceived; for young believers are frequently made to stumble, when they behold those whom they think christians, suffering their religion to mingle so freely with worldly pursuits and pleasures; and careless people are as frequently encouraged, when they see the great barrier of religion thrown down, and all the world flowing on together in one undistinguished stream. Christians! beware both how you cause your weak brethren to offend, and how you give the Lord's enemies occasion to blaspheme.

But I will return to the question I had proposed. I had asked, is any man so foolish as to imagine that he can at once engage in the opposite services of God and Satan? My brethren, there is no delusion more common; judge for

yourselves, look around the world, you will find some few who openly throw off all pretensions to religion, who say, "who is the Lord that we should hearken to his voice?" who scoff at heaven and hell, God and Christ, judgment and eternity; who try to persuade them that the gospel is a fable, that they have no immortal souls, and therefore no duties, no reason to restrain themselves in any inclination, nothing to fear from the consequences of any sin in which they desire to indulge. You will find some few of this utterly abandoned character, strangers to the house of prayer, polluters of the Sabbath, living without even the nominal acknowledgement of a God in all the world, and ridiculers of all who profess any other creed than their own. These of course are the servants of Satan, he leads them captive at his will, though they may not own him, yet at least they own no other master. But this is a small portion of the world; all the rest, all professing Christians who are not really what they pretend to be, are persons who endeavour to do that very thing which is so inconsistent, which our blessed Saviour has declared to be impossible, namely, to combine the services of God and mammon. It is what many of you here present are endeavouring to do. Oh that it were not so! for then you would be all in the way of salvation.

But this is too flattering a hope to be entertained. No; if Christ were now to descend to judge the world, we should not *all* be placed on his right hand. Yet all are apparently engaged in the service of God. This is the *house* of God, dedicated to his worship; here we confess our belief in him, pray to him, praise him, hear his word. For what purpose are we assembled but to do those things which he requires of his servants, and which we think may be effectual in promoting our salvation? Now let me trace some of you to your homes, and mark your conduct when returned to your ordinary society, and to your common occupations in life. In whose service are you engaged, when, immediately on retiring from this place, you discard all serious thoughts of religion from your minds, if you do not even ridicule the subject, and let in a flood of worldliness, vanity and sin, which issues forth in conversation of the most idle, too often most impure and profane description? Whose servants are you, when, in spite of all that you have heard, you give yourselves up to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, preferring the basest pleasures to the will of God? Whose servants are you, when, instead of taking no thought what you shall eat, and what you shall drink, and wherewithal you shall be clothed,

you are scarcely anxious about any thing else? when, instead of seeking *first* the kingdom of God, you seek it not at all? when you disregard the one thing which alone is needful, the salvation of your souls, and eagerly pursue a thousand other things as if necessary to your existence and happiness? Whose servants are you when you are so covetous of gain, that your whole study is how to increase it, and the dishonesty of the means is no impediment, so you can but succeed? Whose works are you doing, when by your conversation and example you are seducing others into the same vicious practices with yourselves? In whose service are you occupied when you give way to pride, anger, envy, malice, when you injure or revile your neighbour, or are uncharitable in any way? To be short, whose servants are you, when you not only commit all or any of these sins, but live in the habitual omission of the duties which God requires of you, in the neglect of prayer, of pious meditation, of holy conversation, of the reading of the Scriptures, of self-denial, of works of charity that are in your power, and of all the positive virtues of the christian life?

But some of you are not much devoted to the world, you do not depart *very far* from God, you do not indulge in many or *gross* sins, you

take but few liberties, you are upon the whole tolerably attentive to the decencies of life and the duties of religion, in short, you only serve Satan a little. My brethren, if you serve him *at all*, deliberately and of choice, whatever service you may at other times pretend to do in God's cause, he will not accept it; it is vain, fictitious, polluted; you must be the servants of God wholly; to be so in part will not suffice; you must not be almost, but altogether christians; your hearts must be whole with God; your lives unreservedly dedicated to him; you must have no will but his, no desire to retain any inclination, any habit, any earthly object, which he bids you to relinquish. There is no accommodating, no compromising, allowed in religion; as the Israelites were commanded to *exterminate*, utterly to destroy, all the idolators of Canaan, not to spare them, to show them no pity,—so are Christians commanded to sacrifice all their evil passions and desires, without mercy and without distinction; to give up every thing without reluctance, which God demands of them; to obey his will in all cases in which he has condescended to make it known to them. It will not do to say, "in *most* things we serve God, surely this and that indulgence may be granted us." Was not this the very case of the young man who had great riches?

When the commandments were repeated to him he could say (and with some degree of truth, it seems) "all these have I kept from my youth up." What a melancholy sequel! To bring him acquainted with his own heart, "yet lackest thou one thing," saith Christ, "sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me." No; he would do *something* for heaven, but not *every thing;* it was not his first, his chief object, he loved his riches better. Was it not just that he should be left to his own choice? that he should retain his riches and lose heaven? But how much more wise was the conduct of the disciples! "Lo! we have left all and followed thee!" May God incline *our* hearts to do the same! to leave *all;* not to pretend, like Ananias, entire devotion to the service of God, and at the same time to keep back something for our worldly enjoyments; not to make some sacrifices, and some exertions, and in other things to consult our earthly pleasure and advantage; but to deny ourselves in every thing that God requires of us; to abandon any affection, feeling, principle, pursuit, possession, which we cannot reserve consistently with our profession of the gospel.

My brethren, the case stands thus with you; "if the Lord be God, follow him; if Baal, (if

mammon, if satan) then follow him." Be decided; if the world be indeed the highest object of your desire, then love the world, and the things that are in the world; hunt after pleasure, amass riches, covet applause, study your earthly interests with such diligence as you think them worthy of; but attempt not to intermingle the services of God with these low pursuits; you may delude *yourselves*, but you cannot flatter or deceive him; you must be content with such a reward as you can obtain from the source whence you seek it; heaven is not for those who have set their affections on things of the earth. But if eternal life be your grand aim, be thankful that you can obtain it on any terms; make manifest your love for the Redeemer, who has put it in your power, by devoting yourselves wholly to his service; then let nothing divert you from the fixed purpose of striving after it, let no worldly object intercept your view of it, let no temptation loosen your hold on it; sacrifice every thing that interferes with the hope of it; despise the world, be unmoved by ridicule, struggle with the flesh, resolutely encounter every difficulty, "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit," that you may persevere with boldness and constancy unto the end, that every earthly power may be subdued within you, and every

earthly taint washed from your hearts, that your sins may be forgiven, and your highest hopes finally crowned with success, and yourselves at length admitted to the everlasting enjoyment of your desires in heaven, for the sake of Jesus Christ our only Lord and Saviour. *Amen.*

# SERMON III.

## THE TRUE GOD AND ETERNAL LIFE.

JOHN xvii. 3.

***And this is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.***

THESE are most important words, demanding the serious attention of all who profess themselves candidates for that life and immortality which the gospel has revealed. They are a concise christian creed, a brief summary of the method by which we may become wise unto salvation. May God give us grace to understand them aright, and ever to exhibit in our lives that we both have a spiritual perception and feeling, and also thoroughly comprehend the practical nature and tendency, of the great truth which they declare.

The plain and simple meaning of the passage is, that eternal life is attained by the knowledge of God and his son Jesus Christ; and the object of my present and future discourse will be to explain wherein this knowledge consists, to direct you to the method of acquiring it, to show you the happiness of cultivating it, and the fatal consequences that must result from the neglect and rejection of it.

But first, I must call your attention to a point in my text, which is worthy of your particular observation, the equality, as objects of religious regard, here implied to exist between the Father and the Son, in the mysterious godhead. Life eternal, the great end of all religion, as far as man is concerned, is attached to the knowledge, not merely of the only true God, but also of Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent; and in order to this most important end, the knowledge of both these divine persons is spoken of as equally necessary; it is equally necessary to salvation, to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. What is this but an express assertion of their equality? What mere mortal man, however eminent, what angel, what archangel, what finite being, though the very highest in order of all creatures, would have presumed thus to couple his own name with that of the infinite

creator of all things, as if the knowledge of himself was no less essential as a qualification for eternal life? In whom besides would not this familiar association of himself with God, have been an impiety, a blasphemy? None but he, who, "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God," could have dared so to deify himself, as to inform mankind that their salvation depended on the knowledge of God and of himself, as if the knowledge of the one was equally indispensable with that of the other. But that Christ did unequivocally assert this equality, you may further learn from an interesting and important conversation recorded in the beginning of the fourteenth chapter of St. John, which, as it relates very closely to my present subject, and indeed expresses more at length the very same truth as that contained in my text, I will read to you. "Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also; and whither I go, ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can

we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also; and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not *known* me, Philip? He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, shew us the Father?"

This passage is a good commentary on my text; the one declares that eternal life depends on our possessing a knowledge of the only true God and of Jesus Christ; the other more fully explains how and why this is. It is because the Father and the Son are inseparably united in the Godhead,—the Father in the Son, the Son in the Father,—so that it is impossible rightly to know the one, without knowing the other also." "He that hath seen me," says our blessed Saviour, "hath seen the Father, how sayest thou then, show us the Father?" God is a Spirit; no man therefore hath seen him at any time, in his true nature and essence, nor could see him; but as much of him as could be displayed to mortal eye, seen through the obscuring veil of humanity, was revealed in the person of his divine Son, who is

therefore called in the Scriptures "God manifested in the flesh," "the image of the invisible God," the "brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person," "the word, who was God, made flesh, and dwelling among us." It is in consequence necessary to our salvation that we should know the Son as well as the Father, because "no man knoweth who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him," and because the Son is himself "the way, the truth, and the life, and no man cometh unto the Father but by him."

This then being the true doctrine, not only of the passage now before us, but of many other parts of the holy Scriptures, I do not hesitate to set it down as the first and most important circumstance in which the knowledge of God, required by my text, consists, that "we should believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ; for the right faith is, that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the son of God, is God and man:" and the Athanasian creed, which I have now quoted, in declaring that this faith is "necessary to everlasting salvation," does not assert or require more in this particular than the words of my text, "this is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent;" for such an equality, (as

I have already shown) is herein expressed, that we must believe the Father and the Son to be mysteriously united in the man Christ Jesus.

Here then, my brethren, is a truth which it is of primary importance to your salvation that you should rightly understand and firmly hold; a fundamental article of your christian faith, upon which the whole superstructure of your belief and practice must be built; for if *not* built upon it, it will be inefficient and unprofitable. I am addressing you as Christians, as persons who *profess* the gospel, and who have the means of knowing *what* the gospel teaches. The state of the heathen world, of those whom the blessed light of revelation has not yet reached, forms no part of our consideration; with *their* duties and *their* hopes we are not concerned, whether, if they worship and serve some Divine Being, of their own imagination conscientiously, according to the knowledge and ability which they possess, they will or will not be accepted and saved through the uncovenanted mercy of an "unknown God," and by the efficacious merits of a Redeemer, in whom they do not trust, because they have never heard his name, may be an interesting question, but it is one which has no relation to our own personal condition; and to any man who should exercise a vain curiosity

about it, Christ might reply, as he did to Peter, when he was too inquisitive into a secret, unnecessary for him to know, "What is that to thee? follow thou me." Leaving therefore those, who have no higher means of information, to the practice of such religion as they can learn from the light of nature, and the obscure hints of uncertain tradition, let us confine our views for the present to our own case. Are *we*, to whom the knowledge of the truth has been vouchsafed, at liberty to invent a religion for ourselves? Is there any safety for us, if we endeavour to worship and serve God in a different way from that which has been revealed, however conscientious be our error, when we might have known the true way? Surely not; otherwise a revelation has been given us in vain, for we could be saved as well without it.

Then my brethren, it is not sufficient for us, (as some in a christian land, and themselves professors of christianity, seem to think,) nor will it avail to our salvation, that we worship God according to our own fancies, and live according to the laws of our own natural conscience; but we must have such a knowledge of the only true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, as to be assured that we can only approach the Father through the Son; that our prayers can only be

successful, when offered through him as an intercessor on our behalf; that our repentance has no efficacy in itself, but is available only by reason of Christ's perfect obedience; that our good works have no inherent merit, but are accepted only on account of and through faith in his worthiness; in fact, that our whole religion, in every part and circumstance, must be carried on through his intervention, as the only mediator between God and man, without whom any thing that we can do is rejected, not only as unprofitable, but even as sinful and displeasing in the sight of God. For see how important this point is; all your religion, however sincere and earnest you may be, is but so much fruitless exertion, if you do not attend to it. What though your prayers are frequent and fervent? If they are offered in your own name, and not forwarded through the intercession of Christ, they are unheard, unregarded petitions;—for "no man cometh unto the Father but by him;" whereas, "whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, (saith Christ) he will give it you;"—"ask in this way, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." What though your repentance be deep and humble? It is unavailing sorrow, if you think that your own tears can wash out your offences;—for it is in the name of Christ only,

"who was bruised for our iniquities, and wounded for our transgressions, and by whose stripes we are healed," that remission of sins is promised to repentance; it is his blood only, that can blot out the stain of human guilt, and so purge the sinner that he shall be clean, so wash him that he shall be whiter than snow. What though with anxious care, and by a long course of laborious striving, you endeavour to master your evil affections, and to keep the commandments of God? If you so hope to enter into life, in dependance on your own virtues, it is but lost labour, for your very virtues are sins in the sight of God, unless recommended by faith in Christ, and performed in simple reliance on the merits of his obedience and death. He himself says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life;" "I am the door, by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved;" and indeed "he is able to save them unto the uttermost, who come unto God by him." But there is no hope or promise held out to those who aspire at heaven upon the grounds of their own deservings; it is building a house upon the sand.

It will therefore be a lamentable, a fatal defect in our christian knowledge, one that will nullify and render void all our religious services, of whatsoever sort, if we fail to preserve in our own

minds that close and intimate connection which my text and the gospel in general declare to subsist between the Father and the Son: for their union is in real truth indissoluble, and therefore must ever be so regarded by us, or else we shall neither serve the true God, nor in the right way. He who worships God without Christ, worships a being who does not exist, a God of his own imagination. No such God has been revealed to us, and we can know no more of the nature of God than has been revealed. He who thinks himself *acceptable* to God without Christ, entertains a sentiment which the Scriptures not only do not authorize, but do explicitly condemn;—for "no man cometh unto the Father but by the Son,"—"by him (only) we have access by faith into the grace wherein we stand,"—"now in Christ Jesus we who sometimes were far off are brought nigh by the blood of Christ,"—"in whom we have boldness and access with confidence, by the faith of Him." He again who hopes for the pardon of his sins at the hands of God, without reference to Christ, indulges a hope that has no foundation, and will certainly be disappointed. Our blessed Saviour commanded that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations;" and the apostles accordingly proclaimed with all confidence, "there

is no salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved." It would be endless to quote texts on this subject, the sum of the whole matter is strongly expressed in one brief but striking sentence of St. Paul's, "God was *in* Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."

Finally, he who supposes that his own works are held in any value by God, so as to procure his favour and approbation, except as the evidences of a living and fruitful faith in Christ, encourages a presumptuous and offensive pride, most unsuited to the infirmities and imperfections of sinful man, whose best doings have need, (I will not say to be *seen through*, but) to be *veiled and hidden by*, the pure and spotless robe of Christ's righteousness; for "by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in God's sight." "We are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood. By grace we are saved through faith (and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God,) not of works, lest any man should boast."

Such is our condition as disciples of the gospel; it has pleased the Almighty to impart to us such a knowledge of himself as is necessary to

our salvation, and we find in that revelation that we have no God without Christ, no access to the Father in prayer, but by the intercession of Christ, no justification but by faith in the righteousness of Christ, no pardon of sin but through the atonement of Christ, no mode of entering into heaven but through Christ, who is "the way, the truth, and the life;" that no grace or blessing is communicated to us but through Christ; that we cannot behold God without fear, nor He us without displeasure, but through the medium of Christ; that no religious intercourse can be carried on between God and man but through the same channel, whereby God's mercies are conveyed to us, and our services recommended to Him; in short, that as Christians, "our life is hid with Christ in God," and that our whole religion is by, through, and in Christ, in such a way, that out of him we have "no God in the world," no comfort, no hope, no strength, no holiness, no salvation; that if we are not adopted in Christ to be the sons of God, we remain in spite of all our desires and efforts what we are by nature, the children of wrath, and heirs of perdition.

Oh then, my brethren, let us be careful that we do not lose the whole benefit of our religion, that we do not deprive ourselves of all the gra-

cious blessings which are promised to the faithful, that we do not sacrifice all the fond hopes of eternal happiness, with which alone we can cheer our toilsome journey through this sad and painful world, by neglecting and rejecting that great and fundamental principle of Christianity, without a regard to which our efforts are vain, and our hopes unfounded. We can be saved in no other way than such as God has appointed and revealed, and we are plainly informed that "this is life eternal, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent;" therefore to endeavour after eternal life, and to indulge in any prospect of it, without the previous attainment of the knowledge here described, is to invent for ourselves, and to trust in a religion, which has no authority from heaven, and to which no promises are attached. It is not for us, ignorant creatures that we are, to ask "how can these things be?" or why should they be so? why can we not be saved without Christ? why may we not be accepted in our own persons, approach God in our own name, work out our salvation by our own virtuous efforts and deservings? It is sufficient that God has informed us of the infinite distance at which we are from him, of the impossibility of our finding favour in his presence, of our utter sinfulness, worthlessness, helplessness, and inca-

pacity for spiritual blessings, without the mediation of his divine and all-perfect Son, "Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption," that, according as it is written, "he that glorifieth, let him glory in the Lord." The wonderful union of the divine and human nature in the person of Christ was accomplished, and that holy Being led a life of unsinning obedience upon earth, and submitted to the pain and reproach of death upon the cross, because God (we have no right to say *could* not, but) for some good and wise reason, *would* not save us by any other method. Our salvation must have been difficult indeed, to call for this great exertion of love and mercy; let us not reject it, now that it is made so easy, and put within our reach, merely because we do not understand the nature or reason of this mysterious proceeding, but rather let us be filled with all gratitude, when we reflect that God has, in compassion for our lost and miserable state, reconciled us to himself by so great a sacrifice, and "so loved the world, as to give his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Rather let us endeavour to follow the apostle's direction, and, since we know that we can only be accepted through Christ, there-

fore "whatsoever we do in word or deed, let us do all in his name, giving thanks to God and the Father through him."

For you must particularly observe, that this knowledge of God, as manifested in Christ, and attainable only through Christ, is not a barren, speculative point of faith, but, when rightly understood and received, affords the most powerful excitement to religious feeling, and the strongest motive to religious practice. It is, in a true Christian, the main spring, which sets his heart in motion, and influences all the actions of his life; by it all his religious affections are strengthened, and made more intense, and, as a necessary consequence, the whole course of his religious conduct improved and rendered more perfect. The knowledge that God would not be content with any other expiation for sin than the sufferings and death of his own Son, whom he loved before the beginning of the world, what an awful sense of his holiness and justice it ought to beget in us! What a lively perception of the odiousness and malignity of sin! What deep humiliation on account of our vileness! What an anxious fear of offending! What unreserved self-condemnation! What agonies of repentance! What earnest cries for mercy and help! What diligent striving after holiness! On the other

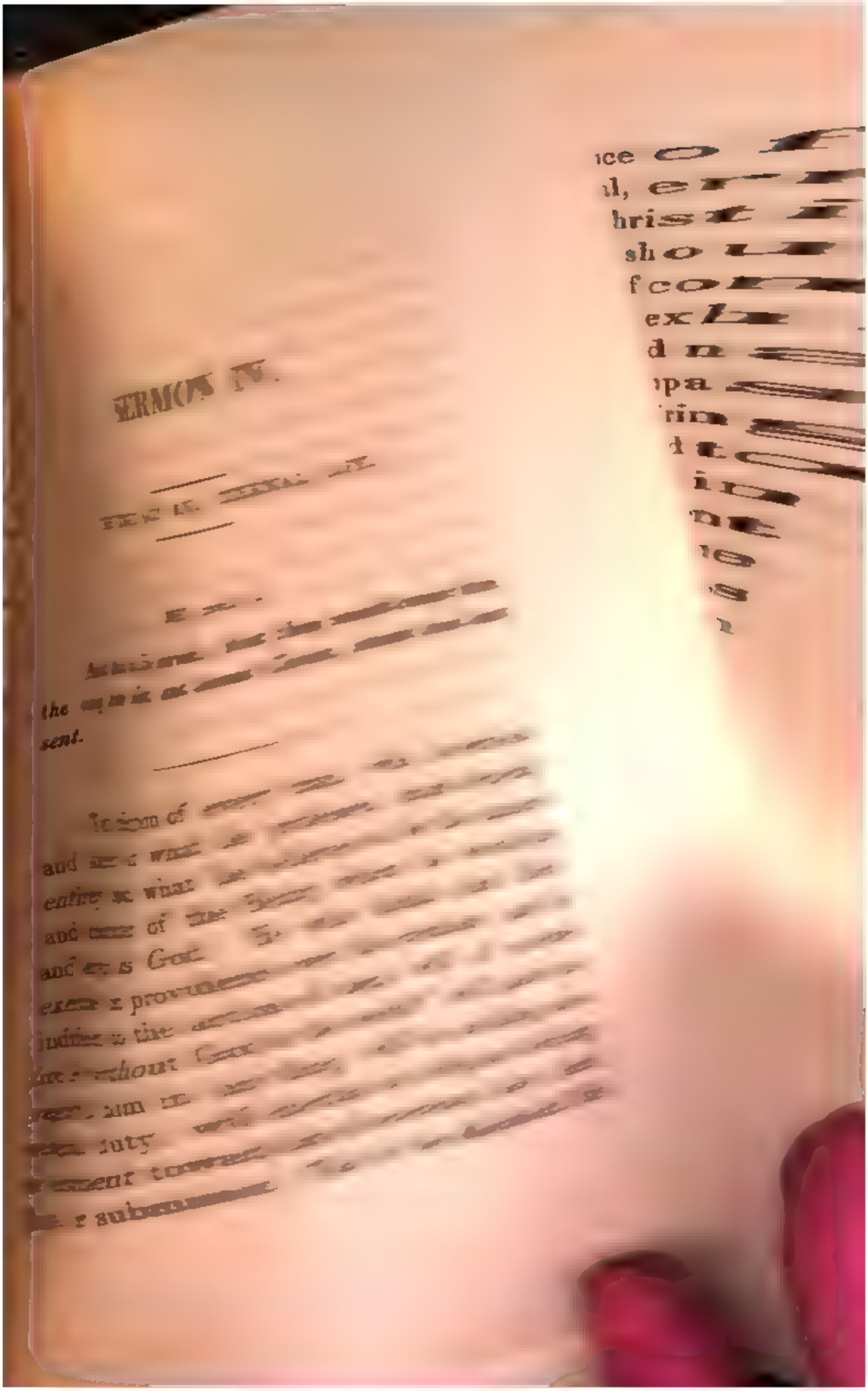
hand, the assurance that God has actually wrought this great work on our behalf, that he would not be provoked to leave us to the just consequences of our rebellion against him, but that he himself provided a ransom, whereby even such sinners as we might be esteemed worthy, and made capable of his favour, and that he "who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him," that he "left the glory which he had with the Father before the foundation of the world," and "became a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," and at last shed his blood on the bitter cross,—that all this was done and suffered, merely that we might be rescued from the hopeless ruin which we deserved, how it ought to excite the warmest emotions of our cold and languid hearts! What love it ought to produce in us towards Him, who first so loved us! What inexpressible thankfulness for his stupendous mercy! What an affectionate zeal in his service! What a joyful hope of the attainment of his gracious promises! What filial confidence in prayer! What a comfortable sense of pardon, calming the sorrows of our repentance! What warm benevolence, what active charity towards all mankind! What sincere forgiveness of injuries! What patient endurance of all the af-

fronts of men, and of all the afflictions of human life! What an anxious desire, what strenuous endeavours, by all the means in our power, to promote the glory of God, and the salvation of our fellow sinners!

Such, my brethren, will be the effects of our possessing a spiritual and practical knowledge of "the only true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent:" that is, of our rightly apprehending and truly valuing the unspeakable mercy expressed in these words, that "God hath purchased us unto himself by the death of his son." Much more remains to be said concerning that knowledge of God and Christ which my text declares to be necessary to salvation; and on a future occasion I hope to proceed with the subject, according to the method proposed in the commencement of this discourse. It is enough for the present to have insisted on the most important and fundamental points in which this knowledge consists; viz. that our salvation is the result of the mercy of God, and the mediation of our blessed Redeemer; this is the groundwork of our religion. May our faith be founded upon this rock! May our religion be truly christian! May we in all things "look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." Through him may we look up to God as a living and com-

passionate Father, who "willeth not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance!" By him may we come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may find mercy and grace to help us in the time of need!" May the Holy Spirit "give us that due *sense* of all God's mercies, that we may shew forth his praise not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to his service, and by walking before him in holiness and righteousness all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord;" remembering always, that "the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, and hath appeared unto all men (when correctly received and heartily embraced) teaches us that denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

May he therefore be our wisdom, our righteousness, and our sanctification in this world; may he also be our redemption, our life, our glory in his Father's kingdom in Heaven hereafter. *Amen.*



of those, who in name acknowledge a God, but in fact deny him. He who pictures to himself a Deity only malevolent, cruel and oppressive, will ever tremble under an abject apprehension of his wrath, and will endeavour to appease him by bloody rites, and self-inflicted torments, and all the terrors of a gloomy superstition, as if nothing but pain and misery could give him pleasure, or procure his approbation. This is a description of the religion of a great portion both of the ancient and modern heathen world. He who has no higher notions of the Deity, than that he is of like passions with sinful man, will expect to gratify him by his very crimes and vices, and by an unchecked indulgence in all the abominable corruptions of human nature. Almost the whole civilized world was formerly polluted by such a base religion as this; every iniquity that could be named, having its supposed patron in heaven. He who imagines his god to be of material substance and form, will make idols to represent him, and bestow his ignorant adoration upon a stock or a stone, which his own hands have fashioned. I need not remind you any further of the various pagan superstitions, to convince you of the consequences that must result from man's entertaining false conceptions concerning the divine nature. I will rather bring the matter

nearer home, by mentioning one instance of an almost equally gross, certainly no less fatal, error, that too much prevails even in the Christian world, and which renders the religion (I should have said the irreligion,) of many, worthy of comparison with the worst that has ever been exhibited in the most unenlightened ages and nations. He, who regards God only as a compassionate, forgiving being, not really requiring strict obedience to his holy laws, nor prepared to execute punishment on those who continue in their natural unconverted state, will never repent of and forsake his sins, but will indulge in all the vices to which he is inclined, with carelessness and security, encouraging himself with the vain hope that his infirmities (as he calls them,) will be overlooked, and that mercy will blot out all the account that may be against him in the records of justice. This man will live and die in presumptuous, unrepented sin, and find too late that his erroneous opinion of God's character, has involved him in everlasting, irremediable ruin. So fatally do multitudes of nominal Christians deceive themselves by representing God according to their own imaginations, or rather according to their own wishes, instead of implicitly receiving the account of his nature and dealings, which it has pleased him to reveal in

the Holy Scriptures, for the instruction and guidance of mankind.

You see, then, that men must of necessity err in their religion, if they have not a true knowledge of God; they can neither worship him aright, nor obey him according to his will. In charity to the heathen world, we humbly trust that the observation is true of *them* in all ages, which St. Paul made when addressing the idolaters of Athens, "the times of this ignorance God winked at." We may be allowed to hope (in the absence of any clear and positive information on the subject) that they, who could not be expected to "believe in him, of whom they had never heard," if they conscientiously made the best use they could of the feeble light which nature and reason furnished them with on the subject of religion and virtue, and lived under the influence of the knowledge and principles thus acquired, were not excluded from the benefits purchased by the Redeemer's death. But wholly different is *their* condition, who have no such excuse for their ignorance; to those, whose lot has been providentially and mercifully cast in a land, from which the clouds of darkness, that once covered the nations, have been dispelled by the "day spring from on high, that has visited them," the knowledge of God and of his will is

now a duty; it is a talent to be cultivated and improved, a blessing to be accounted for; there is no "escape" if they wilfully or carelessly "neglect so great salvation," now that the way to attain it has been made known to them. For there is but one cause of ignorance, and our blessed Saviour truly explains what that is, when he states the reason why "he that believeth not is condemned already." "This (he says) is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil; for every one who doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." And St. Paul says to the same effect, "awake to righteousness and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God; I speak this to your shame:" thereby meaning that sin was owing to the want of the knowledge of God, and that that ignorance was a shame and reproach to those who were guilty of it, after the gospel had been revealed to them.

My brethren, I heartily pray God to convince you of this, that you cannot now be ignorant of him (we shall see by and by what the knowledge of God signifies) without sin, nor *continue* in that ignorance without certain ruin. It might have been expected indeed, did we not too well know what human nature is, how men

naturally love to "walk in the darkness of their minds, being alienated from the life of God, through the (wilful) ignorance that is in them;" I say, but for this, it might have been expected that mankind would eagerly and joyfully open their hearts, to admit the least glimmering ray of light that might reveal to them ever so small a portion of the knowledge, most excellent and most necessary for man to be acquainted with; it might have been supposed, that all would readily understand and thankfully appreciate the happiness implied in these words of congratulation, addressed by our Lord to his disciples, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see," for surely God could not impart to the world a more valuable gift than the knowledge necessary to eternal life. But since, through the perverseness and wickedness of man, God's mercy is not in general thus received, since there are so many who are so debased by sin, that they "love darkness rather than light," and therefore "do not *like* to retain God in their knowledge," it becomes necessary to assume sometimes a severe tone, and to warn men of the fatal consequences of that ignorance, which, in whomsoever it exists, is attributable solely to themselves. Remember then, God of his infinite goodness has vouchsafed to make himself known to a world unworthy of so

nearer home, by mentioning one instance of an almost equally gross, certainly no less fatal, error, that too much prevails even in the Christian world, and which renders the religion (I should have said the irreligion,) of many, worthy of comparison with the worst that has ever been exhibited in the most unenlightened ages and nations. He, who regards God only as a compassionate, forgiving being, not really requiring strict obedience to his holy laws, nor prepared to execute punishment on those who continue in their natural unconverted state, will never repent of and forsake his sins, but will indulge in all the vices to which he is inclined, with carelessness and security, encouraging himself with the vain hope that his infirmities (as he calls them,) will be overlooked, and that mercy will blot out all the account that may be against him in the records of justice. This man will live and die in presumptuous, unrepented sin, and find too late that his erroneous opinion of God's character, has involved him in everlasting, irremediable ruin. So fatally do multitudes of nominal Christians deceive themselves by representing God according to their own imaginations, or rather according to their own wishes, instead of implicitly receiving the account of his nature and dealings, which it has pleased him to reveal in

you should understand it to be of a *practical* nature; that you should not imagine yourselves called upon merely to acquire certain information concerning God, and there to rest, as if that alone were sufficient for all the purposes of religion; but that you should set out with the impression, that, whatever this knowledge may be, it must in every circumstance have an influence upon your hearts and lives. This observation indeed equally applies to the whole of our religion. Barren, unfruitful notions have no place in it; it does not contain a single doctrine, which is not intended and calculated to lead to practice in some way or other. To comprehend the true nature of God with the understanding, is far above the reach of our weak faculties. On this subject, the wisest must agree with David, and say, "such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me, I cannot attain unto it;"— "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven, what canst thou do? Deeper than hell, what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." But we can know as much of God as is necessary, in order to our worshipping and serving him aright, and so is conducive to our salvation; and that is all that

has been revealed, all that is required of us, and all that is useful to us in our present state. We can know that He is Omnipotent, and therefore adore his Majesty, and fear his Power; that He is Just, and therefore be careful not wilfully to transgress his righteous laws; that He is Holy, and therefore study not to displease him by our sins; that He is Merciful, and therefore love and praise Him for his Goodness; that He is Omniscient, and therefore ever live as exposed to his view; that He is our Creator and Preserver, and therefore be thankful for every thing that we have received and enjoy from his bounty; that He is our Father, and therefore submit to him as obedient and affectionate children; that He is our Redeemer, and therefore trust in him for our salvation; that He is our Sanctifier and Guide, and therefore depend on his perpetual inspiration and aid; that He will be our future Judge, and therefore earnestly desire to be so approved before him, as to have hopes of his favourable sentence at the last day. All this we can know of God, and you see how every particular is connected with some duty immediately resulting from it.

Who is there among you then, that truly knows God after this manner? Who but those, whose hearts and lives are thus affected and in-

fluenced by their knowledge? Who but they that are endeavouring to live in strict obedience to his will, in dependance on his strength, in thankfulness for his mercies, in continual prayer for his help, in hope of his favour, in fear of his displeasure? What other knowledge without this, is not vain, unprofitable, a reproach to him who pretends to it? Let the sinner be assured, that, if "he thinks he knows any thing" of God, "he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." He may indeed possess in his head the same information as a true Christian; but so much the more aggravated his sin, so much the more certain, so much the heavier, his condemnation. St. Paul says even of the heathens, that, as *idolaters* they were "without excuse, because that when they knew God, (knew by the light of nature that he was the great Creator and Preserver of the world, and therefore could not resemble those creatures, the images of which they stupidly worshipped,) they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened; professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." And is there not

still less excuse for those, who dwell in the broad daylight of Christianity, if, when they know, or at least might know, (nay, they do know, they cannot be ignorant,) that God is "holy, just, and good," that he is privy to all the deeds of men, to all their words, to all their most secret thoughts, that he is "a hater of iniquity," and that "he will by no means clear the guilty;" they yet "weary him with their sins," living in rebellion against his authority, in defiance of his power, in disregard of his presence, without one serious thought that they are observed by him, or that they will have to give an account of their lives to him hereafter. Are not these the very persons, of whom the Apostle speaks, when he says "they profess that they know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate?" "Surely these are poor, they are foolish, they know not the way of the Lord, neither the judgement of their God." Behold the unchaste and impure, vainly striving to conceal in darkness the licentious practices of which the light would be ashamed, and saying in their hearts that "no man shall see them;" behold the drunkard and intemperate, revelling in the most base and filthy indulgences of carnal appetite; behold the pro-

fane swearer and lewd talker, taking the holy name of God in vain, making a mockery of sacred things, "corrupting others by his wicked blasphemy," and giving vent to the vile thoughts of his depraved heart, in the coarse and foul language of obscenity; behold the fraudulent man, taking advantage of the ignorance of others, and acquiring gain to himself by dishonest arts and contrivances; behold sinners of every description, seeking only how they can gratify the evil desires and propensities of their corrupt nature, and living securely in all the excesses of the most vicious habits; do these know that there is a God, who is "about their path, and about their bed, and who spieth out all their ways?" that there is a God, who "hath power to destroy both body and soul in hell?" and that "the wrath of (this) God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness?" and that He has threatened "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil?" If they do not know it, their ignorance is no excuse, for there are the Scriptures, given by inspiration of God, to assure them plainly of their danger; but if they do, they know what should trouble and disquiet them in

their sins, and make them tremble at the prospect of the "coming vengeance," and anxiously endeavour to "flee" from it.

Call to mind, my brethren, those alarming words of our blessed Saviour, which be sure shall never pass away; "that servant which knew his Lord's will, and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes; for unto whomsoever much is given, of him will much be required." Much is given to *you*, much knowledge of your Lord's character and will; much therefore is required of you, much conformity to that character, much obedience to that will.

The unprofitable servant in the parable is represented to have said to his master, when returning the talent of which he had made no use, "Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard master, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed; and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth."

The reason that he gave for his idleness, should on the contrary have been a motive to industry; and therefore justly did his Lord say "out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant." But this slothful servant's excuse for his unprofitableness, perfectly unreasonable as it was, was quite as good as any sin-

ner will be able to make to God hereafter, when called to account for the use he has made of *his* talent. For what did he say? Just to this effect: "Lord, I knew that thou art severe, requiring a great deal of thy servants, therefore" what? I have laboured diligently and industriously, that I might, if possible, satisfy thy demands?" No; but, "therefore I have done nothing at all." And what better has the sinner to say for himself? O God, I knew that thou art holy, therefore I lived in sin; I knew that thou art just, therefore I despised thy righteous laws; I knew that thou art almighty, therefore I did not fear thy power; I knew that thou art merciful, therefore I hated thee; I knew that I was ever in thy presence, therefore I behaved as if thou couldst not see me; I knew that I received every good thing of thy bountiful hands, therefore I was unthankful; I knew that thou hadst given thy gospel to the world, to teach men their duty towards thee, and how to save their souls, therefore I neglected thy word, forsook thy ordinances, lived without religion, never set my heart and affections on heaven, and gave myself up entirely to worldly cares and pursuits, and to the lusts and pleasures of the body." So inconsistent is he who professes to know God, but in works denies him. Such a knowledge will be a

millstone round his neck, and sink him deeper in the gulf of perdition, whereas the true practical knowledge of God would have been as wings, whereby he might have mounted up to heaven.

But my text joins together the knowledge of God and of Christ. "This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." I showed you at length, in my former discourse, that the most important point in this knowledge is to know that God and man were mysteriously united in the person of Christ, for the merciful purpose of accomplishing the redemption of the world; that the whole of our religion must have reference to this fundamental article of the Christian faith; that we can only come unto God by Christ, only be accepted, pardoned, justified, saved, through him; and therefore that "whatever we do in word or deed, we ought to do all in his name, giving thanks to God the Father through him." I showed you also that when this doctrine is rightly understood and heartily embraced, it adds the most powerful impulse to the religious feelings, and becomes the most efficacious motive to religious conduct, since we thereby know more of the holiness, the justice, and the mercy of God, and therefore have the strongest arguments to obey, to fear, and to love him. But as we

have now seen something of the nature of those duties that result from the knowledge of God the Father, let us devote the little time that remains to a consideration of the effects which the knowledge of his Son Jesus Christ ought to produce in us.

St. Paul shall tell us what those effects ought to be. He says, "giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity; for if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." The knowledge of Christ therefore should be productive of all holiness of life; and he who does not give that evidence of his knowledge, is ignorant and short-sighted, and forgets that Christ "gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." And how then can any man pretend that he knows Christ, when he is living in a sinful, impenitent state? Did not Christ come into the

world for the fixed purpose of making an atonement for sin, because it was so hateful to God, that no other expiation would be accepted? That he might destroy the works of the devil, the author and encourager of all wickedness? That he might give men the most pure and holy laws for their observance? And that he might set them, in his own person, a perfect example of all virtue and godliness? I will omit the other circumstances, and call your attention especially to his life and character. It was peculiar to Christ alone, of all the beings who ever dwelt upon this earth, that he was "free from all spot of sin;" no infirmity either of word or deed was ever manifested in his holy life; nor did any evil thought ever find an entrance into his pure and sacred breast. Do *we* know then whose disciples we profess ourselves to be, when we run heedlessly into sin, or even presumptuously encourage it, thus belying the profession we make, and polluting the name we bear? Was there no sin in Christ, and shall there be hardly any thing but sin in us, his avowed followers? "Let every one who nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity," or let him not falsely affect any knowledge of that unblemished character. We cannot indeed, like him, be "without sin;" human nature is too frail for

that; but we may, "through Christ who strengtheneth us," and if we would be saved, we *must*, keep ourselves clear of the guilt of wilful, deliberate, and also of careless, inconsiderate sin. "Every one who hath the hope of seeing him hereafter as he is, purifieth himself even as He is pure." If we do not thus know *him*, he will deny all knowledge of *us* at the great day, and say, "I know you not whence ye are, depart from me all ye workers of iniquity."

But observe all the separate excellences that were combined in this most holy Personage; remark his great humility, his wonderful descent from the glories and happiness of Heaven, to the meanness and misery of human life upon earth; wonderful descent indeed if He had been born in a palace, and inherited the loftiest throne! But He chose a stable for his birth-place, an obscure female for his mother, a lowly rank for his sphere of life. See Him associate with persons of the meanest origin, condescending to all, washing his disciples' feet, bearing all reproaches with submission, and without the least expression of a haughty spirit. Well qualified was He to say, "learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart" And are we swoln with pride? Shall earth and ashes be proud, when the Son of God was so humble? Shall vain men be proud of

their birth, of their riches, of their honours, of those trifling distinctions by which God has placed them a few steps higher in mere worldly circumstances than some of their fellow creatures, and treat with contempt any of those for whose sake Christ, though "in the form of God, and thinking it not robbery to be equal with God, yet took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man, and being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross?" Know Christ, and know yourselves, and you will find cause enough for *humility*; you cannot display greater ignorance of both than by pride. Consider his unbounded Charity; that exceeding love for an unworthy world which brought him down from Heaven; his unwearied activity in going about for the sole purpose of doing good to the bodies and souls of men; his forgiveness of all injuries; his prayers, even for his enemies and murderers. You know not what spirit you are of when you are angry, revengeful, envious, injurious, ready, not merely to resent an affront, but even to offer one to an unoffending brother. It is not the spirit of Christ, and he who "hath not his spirit is none of his."

But it is not enough simply to be free from this evil disposition; you have no know-

ledge of Christ, if you do not really and sincerely love your fellow-creatures, and show it by doing them good, by kindness, by active exertions in their behalf, by relieving them in their distresses, by devoting a considerable portion of your time, your power, your wealth, to the promotion of their happiness. Profess not the knowledge of Christ, if you have a narrow, selfish heart; there is no room for it there. See again how wholly intent He was upon that one purpose for which He came into the world. As a child, He said, "wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" and afterwards, "I must work the work of him that sent me while it is day, the night cometh, when no man can work." "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." "My meat and my drink is to do the will of my Father which is in heaven." And shall men employ themselves about every thing except that which is the very end and object of their existence, the service of God and the attainment of eternal life? Shall every vain and idle pursuit, shall the cares and distractions of worldly business, shall the pleasures and dissipations of earthly enjoyments, so occupy them that they shall have no time or inclination for that great work, to which every thing else ought to give way, or be made to minister? Oh you will lose

all your labour, you will spend your time and strength "upon that which satisfieth not," if you do not know Christ better than this.

Lastly, observe Him in prayer; how frequent, how earnest, how devout! Take a lesson from this, all ye who neglect that secret communion with God, without which no spiritual life or strength can be preserved in your souls. All ye who are formal, cold, remiss in devotion! You cannot conquer yourselves, the world, or the devil, without prayer; you cannot lead a Christian life upon earth; without prayer you cannot ascend to Heaven hereafter; all depends upon prayer; faith, hope, charity, holiness, the love of God, strength, comfort, knowledge, perseverance, salvation, all are given to prayer, all are denied to those who pray *not*.

I have detained you long, and yet I have been compelled to be brief in my description of the character of Christ, and to omit many particulars in his life, most worthy of imitation by all who profess themselves his disciples. Search the sacred Scriptures attentively and frequently, with prayer for God's blessing upon your study of them, and may you so know Him thoroughly, and by the power of the Holy Spirit be conformed to his image, and follow his steps in all things! May you "grow in grace, and in the

knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! May you "count all things but loss for the excellency of that knowledge!" And "I pray and desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom, and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering, with joyfulness, giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."[1]

And may God, of his infinite mercy, hasten that glorious day, when men shall no longer "teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, know ye the Lord, but when all shall know Him, from the least to the greatest," so that he may fulfil his gracious promise, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more."[2] *Amen.*

1 Col. i. 9, &c. 2 Heb. viii. 11, 12.

# SERMON V.

## THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST.

1 COR. viii. 5, 6.

*For though there be that are called Gods, whether in heaven, or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,)*

*But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we in him.*

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It is clear from the argument pursued in this chapter, that St. Paul had been consulted by his Corinthian converts on the question, whether it was lawful for them to eat the flesh of those animals, which the heathens had offered as sacrifices to their false Gods. The doubt with them was, whether in so doing, they would not seem to connive at, and to sanction this idolatrous worship. In this, and in another place, where he

writes on the same subject, he replies with the soundest wisdom and discretion, and declares it to be in real truth, and in the nature of things, quite a matter of indifference whether what they ate had been so used or not, so long as they did not designedly promote any participation in the superstitous rites of the heathens; the flesh of the victims (which was publicly sold in the shambles) might be eaten with a safe conscience, and with thankfulness to the true God, from whose bounty they received their food; but if any weak Christian, not properly understanding his liberty in this respect, should think otherwise, and be scandalized at the practice, as if it gave countenance to idolatry, he directs them to abstain rather than wound the conscience of a brother, "for whom Christ died:" a very important and judicious rule for the observance of all Christians in their conduct with regard to those things, which are in themselves indifferent, but which sometimes become of great consequence, from the light in which they are viewed by others. Although you are persuaded that you may lawfully, and can without any detriment to yourselves, engage in certain practices, yet, if your conduct therein shall be misunderstood and misinterpreted by others, so as to do any injury to the cause of religion, you are bound to accom-

modate yourselves to their ignorance and prejudices, and to deny yourselves even in that which you know and feel to be really innocent, rather than cause a more infirm believer to stumble; for a thing in its own nature indifferent, becomes sinful, if it operates, even in an indirect way, to the prejudice of the Gospel. Now St. Paul thought this a matter so worthy of attention, that, concerning the particular subject on which he was writing, he declares emphatically, "Therefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."

This is not, however, the subject that I have in view in my present discourse; but I have thought it right to explain it thus far, by way of introduction to the words of the text, and that you may see how they are connected with what precedes and what follows them. The apostle had declared in the verse immediately before the text, that "an idol is nothing in the world;" no real Deity; "and that there is none other God but one; for though (he continues) there be that are called Gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be Gods many, and Lords many) but (or, yet) to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and

we by him." Some have made a difficulty about this passage, doubting whether St. Paul meant to express any distinction in nature, essence, and power between the Father and the Son, whether he meant to imply a superiority in the one, and an inferiority in the other, of these two persons of the holy and mysterious Trinity; but it seems evident, both from the argument in general, and from the particular expressions here employed, that no such thing is intended. He is simply stating the christian's creed in regard to the Unity of God, as opposed to the polytheism, the belief in many Gods, of the heathens. They worshipped a vast variety of imaginary deities, whom they called "Gods and Lords," we have (says he) but one God, one Lord. He does not mean to say, they have many Gods; we have but two, or we have One Supreme God, and one inferior object of worship, whom we call, by way of distinction "Lord;" for Christians had then, and have now, but one God; nor did they ever, nor do they now, in the true church, bestow their adoration on any other, since it is written, "thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve;" and the words "God" and "Lord" are used indiscriminately in the Scriptures, to signify this Supreme Being, as you may remark in the passage I have just quoted, "thou shalt worship the *Lord* thy *God*," nor could he

possibly have intended, in saying, "we have one Lord," to exclude the Father, as a separate person of the Godhead, since that title, and all that it implies, surely belongs to Him, and it would not be correct to say that He is *not* our Lord, or that He is not as truly our Lord, as either of the other persons of the sacred Trinity, separately considered; since all are "co-equal together," and the holy Scriptures bestow the appellation indifferently upon all, whether regarded as united in One God, or according to their distinct and peculiar offices. Moreover, it is evident from the other expressions of the passage before us, that when he speaks of "one God, the Father," and "one Lord, Jesus Christ," he does not mean God and a human being, or any *creature*, since it is nearly the same thing that he says of both, "God the Father, of whom (as the first cause) are all things, and we in him," or rather *for* him, "as it is in the margin of our Bibles, and as the original certainly signifies, *i. e.* devoted to him, designed for his service, "and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom (as the immediate agent) are all things, and we by him," *i. e.* probably, accepted *through* him; so that the whole passage seems to signify that, in opposition to the heathens, who bestow divine honours on a multitude of imaginary Gods and Lords, we worship

but one, the true God and Father of us all, (without reference now to the distinction of persons) and *that* one more especially as made manifest to us in his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is (as the same apostle elsewhere asserts in plain terms) "over all, God blessed for evermore."

My object then, at present, is first to state, and then to prove to you from the Scriptures, the truth of the doctrine, which is intimated in the words of my text, viz. that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, "in whom also we have redemption through faith in his blood," is co-equal with the Father, "very and eternal God;" and may God give us a sound faith, and a right understanding in all things!

I think it impossible for a person, of a sincere and unprejudiced mind, to study the Scriptures with attention, and still to doubt that they teach the doctrine which I have just stated; for if human language *can* be express, and positive, and clear upon any subject, the Scriptures are so on this; and I must remark in the commencement, that never had men a more difficult task in the way of interpretation, than they, who, accepting the Gospel, yet denying the proper divinity of Christ, are under the necessity of justifying their creed by disputing the sense of these passages,

which, in the opinion of all other Christians, so explicitly teach that doctrine; nor in truth can we find so much disingenuity, such far-fetched and subtle, and captious arguments employed on any subject, as in the endeavour to establish this unscriptural tenet. You would be surprised to hear the extraordinary interpretations that are put on sentences, which appear to ordinary readers, of good understanding, as clear as the sun at noon day; and you would be still more surprised, if you knew how often, when all this perverting and misconstruing will not answer the purpose, the sacred writers are accused of ignorance, false argument, and incorrect assertions; or sometimes entire passages are unreservedly declared to be spurious, which are as undoubtedly genuine as any other parts of Holy Writ. And why is all this unholy trouble taken? Why not rather be satisfied with the plain declarations of Scripture? Is it because certain doctrines, received by the generality of Christians, seem opposed to the maxims of human reason? But is it not one of the plainest and most self-evident maxims of human reason, that whatever God says, must be true? And is it not another equally manifest, that God could hardly reveal any thing concerning his own nature, which would not be far beyond the comprehension of

ignorant and short sighted man? Most certainly, yet they, to whom I allude, say, "we must bring every thing that we read in the Bible, to the test of our own understanding; if that be not satisfied, the doctrine is not true, it does not proceed from God." Hence the assumed right of questioning and debating about every thing that is propounded as a matter of Faith; hence the strange, forced, and unnatural interpretations of passages, which contradict some pre-conceived notions; hence the rejection and expunging of others, which will not bear to be so distorted as to suit the purpose required; hence at length (for this is in fact the last resource, when all other expedients fail,) the actual denial of the inspiration, and knowledge of the sacred writers. But, my brethren, if the Scriptures be not written by the inspiration of God, so as to afford us assurance of their containing nothing but the truth, there is at once an end of our Religion; every man may dispute every thing that they teach, there is no certainty in any part of them; one may disapprove of this part, another of that, till at last the whole is pronounced to be error and falsehood. I solemnly and earnestly beseech you, not to study the Scriptures in this spirit, but to believe that they do really contain (as a wiser man than any of us declared, after

deep study of the evidence of their inspiration,) "truth without any mixture of error, doctrines which the God of Truth has revealed, and which, if rightly and with simplicity received, are indeed "able to make you wise unto Salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

You will find in them no doubt, "some things hard to be understood," some things even impossible to be understood; how can you expect it to be otherwise in a divine revelation? I might mention many "earthly things" well known and experienced to be true, which yet you would never be capable of understanding; shall that therefore be a reason for your disbelieving those "heavenly things," the knowledge of which is too wonderful and excellent for you, and which you cannot attain unto? No surely; rather receive with humble docility, and as little children, all that it has pleased God to reveal, and consider all difficult points as proposed to your faith, and not to your understanding; for you are not required to comprehend, but only to believe them, and how can you refuse to believe the word of God, any more than the evidence of your senses, or the conclusions of your reasons?

But, (a man may say) if I meet with some things that are *contradictory* to the reason that God has given me, what am I to do? How can

I believe them? I answer fearlessly, there are no such things in Scripture. If there were, neither could I believe them. We can no more believe contradictions, than we can *do* impossibilities; but God does not require either the one or the other of us. With regard to our present subject, the Divinity of our blessed Saviour, the Scriptures assert that he, who was manifested on earth, in the person of Jesus Christ, is God. This is no contradiction; it is not saying that God is a man, or that a man is God; but that in Him there was a mysterious union of the divine and human natures. What is the *manner* of this union? That is a question which it is beyond our power to answer; therefore (says the proud reasoner) the doctrine is not true. But never was there a more inconclusive argument; by the very same argument you could prove a thousand absurdities; you could prove that there was no God, that the world does not exist, that you yourselves do not exist, and some foolish persons, falsely called philosophers, have actually prostituted the powers of mind, which God gave them for a better purpose, to the childish endeavour to reason themselves into these very absurdities that I have mentioned; in short, I know not that there is any thing in all nature, of the truth and reality of which we can assure ourselves, if we

are always to withhold our belief, until we know the manner *how*, or the reason *why*, it is so; there cannot therefore be a more futile objection than this to the truth of any of the mysterious doctrines of the Gospel. They are *above* our reason certainly, and incapable of being fully comprehended; but as they do not *contradict* it, as they do not teach that a thing is, and is not, at the same time, there is not the slightest ground, upon the score of reason, for the disbelief of them. Is it a contradiction, then, that God and man is one Christ? No more than that the body and the soul is one man. Is it a contradiction that our blessed Saviour should at one time be spoken of as a human being, liable to all the sorrows, and sufferings, and infirmities (sin only excepted) to which our race is subject, and at another be described with all the titles, and as possessed of all the powers and attributes, of the most high God? No more than that man should be variously represented, according to his compound nature of flesh and spirit, at one time as a miserable mortal creature, partaking of the qualities and nature of the brute animals, formed out of the dust of the earth, and destined for corruption and utter dissolution; at another, as a glorious, imperishable being, made, (or rather, as we must in consequence of the fall from original righteousness, now say,) renewed

after the image and likeness of God, and ordained for an eternal existence in heaven. What you *see* of man is not the whole of him; there is an invisible, immaterial, spiritual part within, of a much more excellent nature, of a much higher origin, endued with far superior faculties; and what was seen of Christ while he abode upon earth, in the form of a servant, was not the whole of Christ, his human body was confined to a small space, like that of any mere man, but his essential Godhead, mysteriously united to that body, "the Heaven and Heaven of Heavens could not contain." He spoke of himself, while personally present with his disciples, as "the Son of Man who *is*, (not who was or who will be, but who at this moment is) in heaven." How could He be there, except as God? and what could be a plainer assertion of his Deity? "No man hath seen God at any time" in his true nature, or can see him. Moses was allowed to see a glorious manifestation of his presence, and those who knew Christ in the flesh, saw the goodness, power, and wisdom of God, exercised and displayed in the humble form of humanity; but as Moses could not pretend to have seen on the Mount more than an emblem of the Almighty, so the companions of Christ could not say that they had seen more than a

bodily exhibition of some of the perfections of the Divine nature. St. John tells us that it is a privilege reserved for our glorified state, to see Christ "as he is," and St. Paul speaks to the same effect, "now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face;" now I know in part, but then I shall know, even as also I am known." I think it must be the want of observing this due distinction between the humanity and the divinity of Christ, that has led many persons into error on this important doctrine; their own ideas on the subject are confused, and then they think that contradictions are taught; they imagine us to believe that the *human* nature of Christ is also his divine nature; otherwise, where is the point or force of all those objections which they make to his being God, grounded on circumstances that are connected merely with his manhood? But we neither believe nor teach any such absurdity and contradiction; our doctrine cannot be better expressed than in the words of the Athanasian Creed, which has more sound sense and Gospel truth in it than persons, who hastily condemn it, perceive. It says that Christ is "perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul, and human flesh subsisting; equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead - - - - who, although he be God and man, yet he is not two, but one Christ; one, not

by conversion of the Godhead into flesh (*i. e.* not by changing and transforming the Almighty into a mere human being,) but by taking of the manhood into God (*i. e.* by connecting the human nature with the divine) one altogether, not by confusion of substance (*i. e.* not by blending and mingling together the two natures, so that all distinction is lost,) but by unity of person," (so that He is but one individual Being, though consisting of three separate essences) and then follows that excellent and most appropriate illustration which I have before employed; "for as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ." Now as I do not say that the soul is the flesh, nor that the flesh is the soul, nor that either, apart from the other, is man, but that man consists of both combined, and yet is but one individual being, so I do not assert that God is man, nor that man is God, nor that either, separately, is Christ, but that Christ was truly One Person, in whom the divine and human natures were united.

There were, in the early ages of Christianity (for the enemy soon began to sow tares among the wheat) two sects, who were always esteemed as heretics by what *we* must consider the sound part of the Church; the one taught that Christ was only man, the other that he was only God,

his human appearance being a sort of vision as they strangely supposed. Each of them denied one half of the truth; both together denied the whole; but is not this very fact a striking confirmation of the argument that the true doctrine is that which combines these two opinions? Would it not of itself lead us to infer that there must be palpable evidence in the Scriptures both of the Humanity and of the Divinity of our Redeemer? His Humanity indeed, I do not know that there are any, in the present day, who are so senseless and perverse as to dispute, and our opponents sometimes make it a subject of idle triumph, that we agree with them on this point. We do indeed; we readily admit every proof of it which they can produce, and heartily do we wish that they would as readily agree with us, and with the word of God, which is most clearly and decidedly with us on the other point also, that so they might render deserved thanks to God for his great condescension in uniting himself to our nature, and set a due value on the atonement, which, by the sacrifice of Himself in that nature, He has made for the sins of mankind.

I have stated and explained what it is that we believe concerning the Divinity of Christ, for the sake of removing the erroneous opinion, that we hold *contradictory* doctrines; for as long as

that impression exists, it must prevent the reception of the truth. You have seen then, that there is no contradiction in saying that God and man were united in one Christ, although, no doubt, there is a mystery in this truth (as in many others,) far beyond our comprehension, for "great indeed is the mystery of godliness." It only remains for me now to produce a few of the more striking passages of holy writ, upon which our faith in this particular is founded.

The prophet Isaiah, beyond all question speaking of Christ, (for to no one else can the words by any possibility apply,) says, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father." Again in the sixth chapter, he says, "mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." And St. John, quoting the words that were addressed to the Prophet on that occasion, says, "These things said Esaias, when he saw his (*i. e.* Christ's) glory, and spake of him." In the forty-fourth of Isaiah, verse the sixth, it is thus written, "Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of Hosts, I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me there is no God." In the book of Revelations, (xxii. 13,) our blessed Saviour assumes to Himself the most remarkable of these

titles which you have heard belong to *Him*, besides whom there is no God; "I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last." That it is Christ who is here speaking, is evident from that which St. John adds shortly after; "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly, Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus." (Compare verse 12.) God, by the mouth of the prophet Malachi, (iii. 1,) says, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before *me*," These words does Zacharias, "filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesying," as the Evangelist says, apply to Christ; "And thou, Child, (addressing his infant son, the future Baptist,) shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord, to prepare his ways." (Luke xvii. 6.) In Psalm lxxviii. 5, 6, it is said of the Israelites, that "they tempted and provoked the *Most High God*." St. Paul, speaking of the very same circumstances, (1 Cor. x. 9,) says, "neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted." You need not be informed that our Saviour in the New Testament is most frequently spoken of under those two well known titles, "The Son of God," and the "Son of Man." These indicate, the one his Divinity, the other his Humanity; the meaning and

force of the former expression, I will presently explain. But it is worth your while to observe, that even the humble title, "Son of Man," is an argument of his divine nature; for I believe I am correct in saying, that he was never so called except by Himself; none of his disciples would so disparage his high dignity. And why did He describe himself by this lowly appellation? Because his condition on earth was in all respects a state of humiliation; the new and (if I may so speak,) strange circumstance to *Him* was, that *He* should be the Son of *Man;* he had been the Son of God from all eternity, but he had now a character unknown before, and having condescended to take human nature upon him, was become in a peculiar and appropriate sense, "the Son of Man." It would seem ridiculous in any one, who was really nothing more than a human being, to be continually calling himself even "*a* son of man," "*the* son of man," which was our Saviour's emphatical phrase, whereby he signified that He was so, in a singular and extraordinary sense, and as distinguished from all the rest of mankind; it is a title which no one else has any right to assume, because it would express a difference between himself and the rest of men, which does not exist. Therefore Christ's calling himself "*the* Son of Man," implied his Divinity.

But now let us see what is signified by the more exalted title, "the Son of God." It is hardly necessary to state that this term is not applicable to Christ in the same sense in which it is often applied to holy and pious men, but in an original and peculiar way, as conveying a much more important meaning; in a sense in which it is true of Him alone and no other, just as it is more particularly limited where He is called "the *only*-begotten Son of God." Now what *is* this sense? It implies equality with God; so the disciples and others understood it, when they employed the title to express their belief of Christ's being the Messiah. So the Jews, his enemies, understood it, as you may learn from several instances. On one occasion Jesus said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work; therefore (says the Evangelist, John v. 18,) the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself *equal* with God." At another time, when he made this remarkable declaration, "I and my Father are one," (which observe by the way is a striking assertion of his co-equal Godhead) "then the Jews took up stones to stone him." And why? Mark their answer; "for a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy, and

because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God." Again, when the High Priest required of him an oath, according to the Jewish form, saying "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell me whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God," and he replied "thou hast said," (*i. e.* thou hast said the truth,") adding, that hereafter he should be seen sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven, "then the High Priest (to testify his abhorrence) rent his clothes, saying, he hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold now ye have heard his blasphemy," and accordingly he was on the instant condemned to death. But it was necessary that the Roman Governor should pass sentence upon Him; and upon what grounds did the Jews urge the justice of it? Solely on account of this blasphemy. "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God." In none of these instances, you will observe, did our blessed Saviour deny the correctness of the interpretation which his enemies put upon the title that he assumed. He never said, "You accuse me unjustly, I do not pretend to be the Son of God in a sense which implies equality with God;" which there can be no doubt he would have done, had he not been conscious that

the title truly belonged to Him, and that He had used it in that exalted sense. The same remark is to be made on his allowing Thomas to call him, " my Lord, and my God." He did not rebuke him, as having uttered blasphemy; but, by his silent acceptance of the homage, he acknowledged that it was due to Him. Indeed on one occasion, he expressly said, that " all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father." What would you have more? Only consider the profaneness of this speech in the mouth of a mere man, or of the highest created being, of any, in short, but one equal with the Father! Of course, my brethren, it is far beyond our weak faculties to understand what that precise relation is, which is expressed by the terms Father and Son, as applied to the first and second persons of the Holy Trinity. Divine mysteries, revealed in human language, must always be imperfectly comprehended. As we can have no correct ideas on such subjects, there must of necessity be some inaccuracy in the words employed; but, in the present case, we may be sure of this at least, that as the terms, " Father and Son," applied to human beings, are expressive of that relation of two individuals to each other, between whom it is likely that there should subsist the greatest similarity of nature, the closest intimacy, the

most perfect equality, and the warmest affection, therefore the union between God and Christ is represented by this figure, for the purpose of bringing down this great truth, in some measure, to our conception, and enabling us to form some notion (though an inadequate one,) of the strict connection, exact equality, and entire harmony that exists between these two persons of the Godhead.

St. Paul, in the first chapter of Hebrews, has told us in plain terms, how high a rank the Son holds, far above all created beings; in fact, he has *described* him as God, and *called* him God.

With this passage, we may couple the commencement of the first chapter of St. John.

Precisely of the same tenor, and no less explicit, is that remarkable passage, Colossians i. 15, 16, 17.

In the same epistle, we read, "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."

In Philippians ii. 5, 6, is this passage, "Let the same mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but took upon him the form of a servant," &c.

Again, the same apostle, 1 Timothy iii. 16, says, "without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh;"

adding other particulars which apply only to Christ.

In the Revelations (v. 13,) we read, "Blessing, and honour, glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." Could this praise be ascribed to God and Christ, in the very same terms, without shocking blasphemy, except on the supposition of their perfect equality?

Could St. Paul without impiety, have associated them, as he has done in that benediction which we so frequently use, except on the same grounds? "Grace be to you, and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ."

Could Christ himself, except this doctrine be true, have presumed to unite these names so familiarly in the form of words, in which He appointed that the ordinance of Baptism should be administered, "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost?"

Who, moreover, can doubt what He meant to assert, when He said, "Before Abraham was, I am?" "I am;" an extraordinary expression, only to be understood in the same sense in which God used it, when He declared to Moses, that this was his own peculiar name, a name signifying an eternal self-existence.

son of the Holy Trinity, that "one living and true God," to whom alone all honour, praise, and adoration, of right belong. Now as there can be no true religion, without a right faith, and even a right faith is of no value, unless it is followed by a right practice, I propose on the present occasion, to add a very important and necessary sequel to the doctrine which I formerly delivered to you, by making a practical application of that sublime truth. And God grant that we may never be content with barren, unfruitful knowledge, which too often "puffeth up," without edifying or sanctifying, but that the affections, feelings, and principles of our hearts, and the whole conduct of our lives, may derive their tincture and bias from what we know and understand of "heavenly things!" May the great truths of the gospel never be hoarded up in our minds as a useless treasure, but effectually operate on our souls with a divine and spiritual energy, and be made manifest in all the works of piety and holiness, to the glory of God, to the conviction and improvement of our fellow creatures, and to our own salvation in that day when it shall be examined, not only what foundation we have laid, but how we have built thereon!

The Scriptures furnish us with many motives

to a holy and religious life; there is the hope of future blessedness in heaven; there is the fear of a miserable eternity in hell; there is the positive command of God; there is the excellent and lovely nature of Christian piety and morality; there is the consideration of God's all-seeing eye; there is the general goodness and kindness of God towards us; there is the imitation of God's divine nature; there is the perfect pattern and example of Christ; there is peace and tranquility of conscience; there is even our temporal interest and welfare, which are best and most effectually secured by virtuous conduct; all these are by turns proposed as motives that should influence us to the performance of the practical duties of Christianity; and all ought to have their proper places assigned to them, and their due weight attached to them, both by the preacher in enforcing these doctrines, and by Christians in general, in applying to the practice of them. But these alone are comparatively of inferior force and obligation, and are certainly quite defective, as viewed in connection with the Christian scheme. There remains to be mentioned one motive more powerful than all, more peculiarly Christian than all, and therefore more important than all, and that is Faith in the Incarnation and Atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You require not now to be informed, (at least on the present occasion, I shall suppose none of you to be ignorant of those two prime doctrines of our holy religion,) that our acceptance with God is due solely to the meritorious obedience, and death of our blessed Redeemer, and that faith is the mean, through which this great mercy is communicated to each of us individually, and made our own. This latter doctrine is no less important than the former; for in vain has Christ died for us, or opened the door of salvation to us, if we are not in real fact ultimately saved.

What then is required of *us* in order to this great end? God has done His part in the free dispensation of His grace; what remains on *ours*, to render that grace personally available and effectual? only to give it a hearty and sincere reception. And how is this to be done? Through faith: by firmly believing that it has really been bestowed. So the Scriptures plainly and constantly assert; "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "By grace ye are saved, through faith." "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through

our Lord Jesus Christ." "Ye are all the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus." Here is sufficient authority for the fact that it is through faith (not *on account* of faith, as the meritorious cause, but *through* faith, as the mean) that justification and salvation are conveyed to us, and received by us. Why not through obedience to God's commandments? For two reasons; one, because in that case we should be inclined to think that we were to be saved by our own goodness, than which nothing can be farther from the truth; the other, because faith is the most powerful motive to obedience, the very fountain and origin of all other Christian principles and virtues. It includes all other motives within itself; in fact, it produces them, and gives them an activity and efficacy which they would not otherwise possess. It serves, moreover, as a bond of union to them all, combining them together, so that they shall not act in an irregular, unconnected way, as so many separate and distinct impulses, but that their whole collected force shall bear upon the heart at once, and subdue it by an irresistible power. These are the reasons why faith is so highly spoken of, why it is made the grand instrument and mean of our salvation? But *what* faith? Surely not the mere belief that a certain man, like ourselves,

was commissioned to reveal a new religion to the world; it would be exaggeration so to describe such a faith, or to attribute so great a power to it; but faith in the truth of that doctrine which I set before you in my former discourse, that He who came upon earth to make known the will of God, and to suffer death in our behalf, was *not* a mere man like ourselves, but the eternal, well-beloved, and only-begotten Son of God himself, "in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." This is the faith to which such mighty efficacy is ascribed; and I will endeavour now to make you see, with how good reason it is so commended, and exalted above all other principles and motives.

I will consider this subject in the order, in which it appears to me that ideas would arise in the mind of a man, who should suddenly and without any previous preparation, be convinced of the truth of the doctrine.

He would naturally enquire first, what was the *cause* of this wonderful undertaking? There must have been some most important object proposed, which could persuade the Son of God to leave the glory that he had with the Father before the foundation of the world, and take upon him the form of a man, nay of a servant, and in that form to become obedient unto death,

even the death of the cross! The cause, he would be told, was the sinfulness of mankind, "your own sins individually." God so abhors sin, that this was the only way in which he would receive satisfaction for it. Since no human being was able to expiate simply his own offences, much less those of any other man, least of all, those of the whole world, God exacted the whole penalty of his own Son, who for that purpose assumed human nature, and was made in the likeness of sinful man, that at least the same *nature* which had transgressed, might also suffer for the transgression. "Alas then, the man might exclaim, what grievous sinners we must be! and myself no less than the rest! I had before been under a wrong impression on this subject; I had before thought myself upon the whole a person of very fair and respectable character, possessed of many good feelings and praiseworthy qualities, infirm indeed, and irresolute, and inconsistent, and often acting in opposition to my better knowledge, but still such an one as God might look upon with favour, and make great allowances for, in consideration of the frail and imperfect nature which I inherited at my birth. But now I behold myself in quite another light; I perceive that God must be of purer eyes than to regard my sinfulness with indifference; I must in my-

self be odious and disgusting in his sight; otherwise such an extraordinary method would never have been taken, to render my person acceptable with him. I am humbled to the dust by the contemplation of his displeasure against sin, thus strikingly manifested."

Thus, as a fruit of faith, that the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, made flesh and crucified for our sins, begets in us a more lively sense of the great danger, and extreme offensiveness of sin, than any other argument or consideration could do. We might be told of this truth in the strongest terms that language furnishes, it might be represented to us in the most vivid colours of description, but still all would be weak and insufficient; we should have nothing like an adequate notion of the real fact; nothing could so forcibly convince us of the "exceeding sinfulness of sin," as the proof now set before our eyes, in the incarnation, sufferings, and death of our Redeemer. Now we see what ground there is for repentance, humiliation, self-condemnation; how utterly our vain, proud opinions of ourselves are falsified; how empty is the pretence of self-righteousness; how great need we have to cry aloud for mercy and pardon to the God whom we have offended. "Be humbled, and repent, or ye shall all perish," is

the language impressively addressed to you from the cross of Christ.

But what would be the next thought in the mind of the person supposed? He would reason thus—Surely then it is not enough for me to perceive my unworthiness, and to be sorry for my sins; I must hate them, I must forsake them, I must diligently strive after holiness. Yes indeed, this is the necessary consequence; shall we love those sins that required so great a sacrifice? Is not sin still the same, still equally abominable in the sight of God, as when He condemned and punished it in the person of Christ? Or rather, is it not more grievous in its nature, now that we have seen the displeasure of God so remarkably displayed? Shall we crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame? If we do not turn from our sins, "and bring forth fruits meet for repentance," the Cross itself affords no refuge for us. Christ died *for* sin, we must die *unto* sin; "that like as He was raised from the dead, by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Oh! think not that you can safely continue in your sins, because Christ has suffered for you, when that very circumstance most clearly proves, that without holiness, you cannot be pleasing in the sight of God. Think not that his righteousness will

be imputed to you, if you exhibit no love of it, no conformity to it, in your own persons and characters. "They that are Christ's, (and these only will be accepted for his sake,) have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts." "There is no condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus;" but who are they? Hear the end of the sentence—"who walk, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." "Now the works of the flesh are manifest," and equally so are the works of the Spirit; in the one is included all sin, in the other all holiness. Well then, "if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."

Listen to St. Paul, who tells you in the plainest terms, that God was manifested in the flesh, not only for the forgiveness, but also for the sanctification of mankind: "the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour (which means the great God our Saviour,) Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar

people, zealous of good works." Thus effectually is holiness taught you by the Incarnation of the Son of God.

The next thought that would occur to a man circumstanced as I have imagined, would probably be a reflection on the exceeding value of his own soul. He would reason with himself in this manner; "Surely it could be no small or insignificant matter, that called forth such an exertion on the part of God. What was the design of it? The salvation of my soul. In how great account then must that soul be held by God, that He should take such means to save it! To what dreadful danger it must be exposed! Of what extreme happiness it must be capable! And yet, I have been hitherto thoughtless and unconcerned about it, inattentive to its high interests, nay almost forgetful even of its existence within me! I have hitherto been bestowing all my care about temporal things; I have been devoted to the pleasures of sense, absorbed in the pursuit of earthly happiness. How forcibly does God, by his strange method of Salvation, convince me of my great mistake! How must my soul be above all price to *me*, when He himself thought it not beneath Him to purchase it at so great a cost! Let me henceforth be ashamed of my former ignorance and folly, and learn of God to

set a higher value on that precious and immortal part."

My brethren, may such reflections take possession of your own minds; for they are indeed most true and just. Since God sent his Son to redeem your souls, depend upon it they are of that value, that you would make a most unprofitable exchange, if you were to gain the whole world, at the expence of them. God does not employ great and extraordinary means to bring about unimportant ends; He does not waste His resources, if I may so speak, in this extravagant way; He does not make a great effort to accomplish a design of little consequence. No, you may be confident that Infinite Wisdom adjusts the means to the end; and therefore, perceiving, as you do, the wonderful method He took to deliver man from the consequences of sin, you cannot doubt that those consequences were of the most awfully important nature. How lightly and unconcernedly do we talk of Eternity, Heaven and Hell! The vast import of these words God knows far better than we do: but are we not altogether senseless, when He has practically shown us of what momentous interest are the things which they signify, if *we* contemplate them as trifles, unworthy of our serious regard! Cease then from this inconsiderate fatal trifling,

now that you have been taught of how great importance God himself considers your salvation; flee with all your speed from the wrath to come; lay hold with all earnestness on the blessed hope of eternal life; prize Heaven above all earthly goods; fear Hell beyond all earthly evils; cast the world, and things sensible and temporal, behind your backs, and "press forward" with vigour, and anxiety, and strong desire, "towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God, in Christ Jesus," thinking it immaterial (as indeed it is) what you gain, or what you lose, of the perishable things of this world, if you attain "the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, which is reserved in Heaven for those that shall be heirs of Salvation." Thus you may derive from the great mystery of "God manifested in the flesh," the most impressive and convincing proof of the value of your souls, and so be persuaded to despise in comparison all inferior things, and to walk ever in that path which leadeth to eternal life, the happiness whereof no eye hath seen, no ear hath heard, nor the heart of man hath ever conceived.

Let us now proceed a step further with the case that I have taken in hand. Impressed (as you have seen) with a deep sense of his own unworthiness in the sight of God, and enabled

to form some estimate of the immense importance of the blessing designed for him, the man is lost in wonder at the goodness and love of God, in so graciously interfering on his behalf. "How (he asks) had mankind deserved this great mercy? what title had they to the divine favour? a corrupt, sinful race, alienated from God, living in defiance of his power, in forgetfulness of his presence, without desire of his approbation, with fear of his displeasure, following the bent of their evil nature, acknowledging (almost without exception) scarcely any other influence than that of sense, of passion, of self-interest, of pleasure, and of vanity; departed, in short, as far as possible, from their original excellence, that pure image and likeness of God in which man was first created, what did they naturally inherit, what did they by their actual depravity and wilful transgressions deserve, but wrath and punishment? Yet God would not be provoked to take vengeance, without affording them all possible means of escape, consistent with his own justice, and with their free-will. And what a wonderful method did he devise for this purpose! such a plan as infinite mercy alone could have proposed and executed! Thus indeed was manifested the love of God towards us; in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died

for us. 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and gave his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.' Oh what gratitude, what love do I owe to God, for this his unspeakable mercy towards me, a sinful and worthless creature! And shall I be content with empty wonder and inactive praise? Can I make no "return unto the Lord for all the benefits he hath done unto me?" No indeed; it is far beyond my power to make the slightest repayment, but I can feel a sense of his goodness, and exhibit my thankfulness, and that is all that is required of me. Shall I not then love him with all my heart, and all my soul, and all my mind, and all my strength? Shall I not put my whole trust in Him, diligently strive to please Him, cautiously avoid giving Him offence, delight to hold secret communion with Him, dearly prize and deeply study and readily obey his holy word? Shall I be cold, and reluctant, and formal in his worship? Shall I hesitate to make any sacrifice that He requires, or doubt that He requires it solely for my good? Shall I not under all circumstances esteem it my highest happiness and privilege, to have opportunities of testifying my entire devotion to the will of so gracious a benefactor?"

Such are the feelings that ought to arise in

the heart of one who contemplates the love of God, as displayed in the work of redemption. May love towards God be "shed abroad in (all) our hearts, my brethren, through the holy Ghost given unto us," and may we ever possess "that due sense of his great mercy, that we may show forth his praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to his service, and by walking before him in holiness and righteousness all our days."

Thus you perceive how faith in the grand doctrine that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself," awakens that most powerful Christian motive, the love of God, the very spring and principle of all piety and virtue.

But there is one more peculiar effect that ought to result from the consideration of God's love towards us, which would perhaps next engage the attention of a person meditating on this subject; God has so loved me, surely I should love my fellow-creatures! What kindness I ought to show them! How zealous I ought to be to promote their welfare! How difficult to receive provocation from them! How ready to bear with patience and meekness their affronts, to forgive with sincerity their injuries! Shall I give way to sudden anger, or entertain deliberate malice and revenge against a brother, when God has dealt so

mercifully with me? Shall I exact my hundred pence, when he has forgiven me ten thousand talents? No; O my blessed Lord, may all men ever recognize me as thy disciple, by my love for those my brethren, for whom thou didst not refuse to shed thy precious blood! Teach me to forgive others their trespasses, as thou hast forgiven mine, lest thou justly withdraw thy pardon, and require of me all my debts, even to the uttermost farthing! Make Christian benevolence to influence my thoughts, words, and actions, that I may be enabled in some measure to obey thy new commandment, and both to feel and to manifest towards my neighbour a portion of that love wherewith thou hast loved me! For thy sake, O Lord, may I do this; and be thou pleased to accept it, according to thy gracious promise, "for as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me!"

Thus then the great truth which I have been practically applying, affords the strongest incentive to Charity, the most eminent of the Christian virtues.

And if we next proceed to Humility, is not the same observation true? I have shown before what a humbling view of our sinfulness this doctrine presents to our eyes; I speak now

of humility in another sense. Is not that pride abashed, with which men are too often puffed up, by the contemplation of their superiority over others in rank, or wealth, or power, or talent, when it is remembered how lowly was He whom we call "Lord and Master?" He who was in the form of God, and who thought it not robbery to be equal with God, and yet made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross! Truly in this fact is a sermon on humility, which no language can improve. Learn from it, my brethren, not to be high-minded, but in "honour to prefer one another, each esteeming others better than themselves." "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

If again, we speak of Christian Hope, where shall we find surer ground for it, than in this reflection; "if God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Who can despair, who can even doubt of the good-will of God towards us, when he has thus declared it? He *has given* his Son; what less favour will he refuse to those who sincerely ask him? However

aggravated your sins, however unworthy you justly esteem yourselves to be, yet be not dejected by the unhappy apprehension that He will not receive you, if you make your suit to him in the humble language of true and heart-felt repentance, and plead the merits of his beloved Son, with whom he is well pleased, and with all believers, for his sake. Approach him with confidence, rely on him without suspicion, come boldly to the throne of grace for help in the time of need.

Lastly, where will you find such support in the day of sorrow and distress, as in the consideration that the Captain of your Salvation voluntarily chose a state of affliction, that he might be made perfect through suffering, and thus sanctified that condition, and shewed it to be really good for man to be afflicted? And where will you find such encouragement in the prospect of death, as in the thought that He trod that gloomy way before you, and for you, triumphing over that last enemy of man, depriving him of the sting which made him formidable, and opening a passage, through the grave, to the glorious and happy regions of eternal life?

Upon the whole then, my brethren, you perceive that the doctrine of the union of God and man in Christ, is not a matter of dry, uninteresting knowledge, nor an article of barren

faith, but that, if rightly received, it is the prolific parent of all the motives, principles, and feelings, by which a Christian ought to be governed, and which (when they have taken firm hold of the heart,) will be displayed in the whole tenor of his life. Therefore we see a good reason, why we should be justified by faith, because the existence of this faith, in a mind that has sincerely embraced it, implies the existence of every thing else which the Gospel has declared to be necessary to salvation. A deep conviction of sin, hearty repentance, an earnest endeavour after holiness, a high regard for the welfare of the soul, and the interests of Eternity, an ardent love of God, a zealous devotion to his service, an animating hope of the fulfilment of his gracious promises, an undoubting confidence in His goodness, a filial resignation to his will, an active and universal charity towards our fellow creatures, a lowly estimation of ourselves, a patient endurance of affliction, a powerful encouragement against the fear of death; all these are the necessary consequences of a firm faith in that fundamental doctrine, that He, who took our nature upon Him, and suffered and died for our redemption, was truly the eternal and only-begotten Son of God, one with the Father, the Lord of life and glory, the image of the invisible God. Had he

been a mere man, the contemplation of what he did and suffered for us, would not have supplied such motives, or given such an impulse to the feelings; but when we are assured of the high character of Him, who condescended to such a state of humiliation, and made so great a sacrifice for our sakes, then all those affections are excited, all those inferences are drawn, all those practical results follow, which I have described.

"Thanks, therefore, be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ!" "Giveth us the victory," not merely by his Son's personal triumph over all the enemies of our salvation, (for even this is of no avail to those who do not individually participate in the triumph,) but also by furnishing us with such arguments, derived from the consideration of his divine nature, as are of mighty efficacy, through his assistance, to fortify us against all the conflicts, which we have to endure in our Christian warfare. This is that "shield of faith, whereby we are able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one." May we ever be armed with it, and when assailed, whether by the sin that dwelleth in us, by the evil passions of our minds, by the corrupt inclinations of our flesh, by the temptations of the world without, by the internal suggestions of the devil, by the pains of afflic-

tions, or by the fear of death, may we be "more than conquerors, through Christ who strengtheneth us;" and having prevailed, may we finally realize that gracious promise, "to him that overcometh, I will give to eat of the tree of life." Grant this, O merciful Father, for Jesus Christ's sake, thine only Son, our Lord and Saviour. *Amen.*

# SERMON VII.

## THE LOVE OF GOD.

DEUT. vi. 5.

***Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.***

IT is scarcely necessary to remind you, that the books of Moses contain the whole body of the laws, religious, moral, and civil, by which the Jews were governed; nor, although I have for the sake of distinction enumerated them under three heads, as relating to the separate obligations of duty towards God, towards their neighbours, and towards the state, are you ignorant that they were all in one sense religious, inasmuch as they were imposed by divine authority, so that every law could claim for itself more peculiar reverence than is due to mere human

enactments, as being an immediate commandment of God. Yet, although they were all so solemnly sanctioned, it appears that, in the course of time, there arose a frivolous question among this people, as to which was the greatest, the most important, the most necessary to be observed, of all those numerous laws. The question seems to imply a general deficiency of true religious principle; for how could a really pious man think of asking, "In what particular duty that God has enjoined, does He most require my obedience?" Such a man would not for a moment believe that it is more pardonable to disobey in some instances, than in others; for he who duly respects the authority, will feel himself bound to pay equal attention, on all occasions, to every thing which that authority has ordained. The question itself therefore betrays the prevalence of an outward, and ceremonial religion, of that sort of religion, which wears the "form of godliness, without possessing the power of it;" it could have occurred only to men, who were desirous to keep up a *shew* of devotion, while they were not influenced by the *spirit* of piety; to men, who felt their duty towards God to be a labour and a task that encroached upon their liberty, instead of a pleasing service performed with a willing heart; to men, whose religion was an encum-

brance, instead of a delight; to men, in short, who were more anxious to find out what was the very least required of them, than how they might most fully testify their allegiance and fidelity to God. I will not say that such an irreligious feeling was peculiar to the Jews; I wish we had no examples of it among Christians; however, such must have been their feeling, when they proposed that unreasonable question to our Saviour, "Master, which is the great commandment of the law?" And most wisely was the question answered, and most deservedly was the feeling, that prompted it, rebuked by his reply. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; this is the first and great commandment." For, although by that reply, Christ appeared to sanction the opinion, that there was one commandment of especial importance, and pre-eminent in obligation above all the rest, yet he judiciously selected one out of the whole body of the Mosaic law, which included all the rest, which could not be observed separately, and to the neglect of the others, but which in itself implied the necessity of universal obedience. He singled out that one, which expresses and comprehends the very spirit and essence of all religion; not such a law, as could gratify the indolence of a

cold and formal worshipper, and induce him to fancy that an exact and punctual attention to it might relieve him from what he considered the burthen of religion, and compensate for carelessness and negligence in other matters, but one, with which all the others were intimately and inseparably connected. For if this one be strictly obeyed, and if God be really loved with all the powers of the soul, and affections of the heart, the mind can no longer rest satisfied with a partial obedience to him, but will of necessity endeavour to cultivate perfect holiness, entire and unreserved submission to his will, in all things. By this answer therefore, those who "tempted" him, were unwarily trapped in their own devices; they were at once instructed, and reproved, and confounded, so great was the wisdom with which he spake! No wonder indeed, that his enemies were abashed, and that "no man from that day forth durst ask him any more questions."

My brethren, with God "is no variableness, neither shadow of turning;" as in the government of the natural world, consisting of such various and dissimilar parts, there are a simplicity, and uniformity, and harmony, which indicates the presence of one and the same divine mind pervading the whole, so there is a consist-

ency and oneness (if I may so speak) in the great and fundamental principles, which He has at different times revealed, for the guidance of his rational creatures. Particular rules were necessary for the Jews, under their peculiar circumstances, which are not necessary for any other people; minute regulations were imposed on them, which are not required in the case of persons free from the temptations to idolatry, to which they were on every side exposed. These laws, therefore, not being adapted to the world in general, are repealed, and annulled; but the great principle of love to God, as the Maker, Governor, and Benefactor of all mankind, remains ever the same, and unchangeable, and doubtless will remain the same throughout all the ages of Eternity, the first and great commandment. It is the same law that rules the holy Angels, who with perfect obedience do the will of God in Heaven; the same law, that will hereafter bind together, in their several ranks and gradations, all the united children and servants of one Almighty Father, and Supreme Lord, in that kingdom of universal harmony, where willing subjects only shall be assembled together, and from which "all things that offend, and they which do iniquity," shall be for ever excluded.

Let me request your particular attention to

the terms and nature of this first law. It is not said—"thou shalt *obey* the Lord thy God, with all thy powers, and in every particular;"—for although God, by his sovereign authority, might have imposed such a commandment, yet this would have been a mere decree of a Being, who conscious of his power, did not condescend to supply his despised subjects with any other motive to obedience, than the simple knowledge of his will; and we know that the proud spirit of man would have been very apt to hazard the consequences of rebellion against a law, whose only sanction was superior power. Neither are the words, "Thou shalt *fear* the Lord thy God;" authority, that is supported by Fear alone, gives but little satisfaction to him who possesses it, and is felt as so sore an oppression by those who live under it, that every act of submission is, as it were, extorted from them by force, and instead of being ready and willing servants, their whole study is how they may disobey with impunity. So that if God were of such a nature, as to desire to rule by power and fear alone, great and awful as He is, He would exercise an unenvied dominion over a discontented and reluctant world, ever pregnant with the spirit of rebellion, ever struggling against the chains that hold them captive, ever cursing in their hearts the sword suspended over

their heads. But is such "the law of the Lord?" Most unlike it. "God is love." The king is a father; the subjects are children; the throne of heaven is a "mercy seat;" the sceptre of the Almighty is an olive branch, a wand of peace; his crown is a crown of glory indeed, but the pure light of that glory is Goodness; the object of all His laws is to promote the happiness of the whole rational creation; and the very first and greatest in that code demands but a return of love and affection.

I will not spend any time in endeavouring to persuade you, that much more powerful, and more readily obeyed, is that authority which is founded in Love, than any other kind whatever. Where mutual kindness exists among men, there is always a mutual anxiety to please, and to be of service. No man needs a command to compel him to fulfil the wishes of a friend, to whom he is sincerely attached; it is a pleasure to him to be instrumental to the other's happiness; he is amply repaid for any trouble it may cost, by the gratification which he feels in bestowing it. For want of higher ideas, ideas more worthy of the great subject, we must consider the relation between God and man, as of the same nature, as an intercourse between friends; God, the kind benefactor, the author of "every good gift, and

of every perfect gift," who "loveth us, and poureth his benefits upon us;"—man, the humble receiver of such inestimable favours, bound to Him by the strongest ties of gratitude. If we know and feel this to be the nature of our connection, we cannot fail to "love" Him; our delight (as the Psalmist says,) will be "in the law of the Lord;" we shall "have pleasure therein." Observe how David ("a man after God's own heart,") expresses himself on the subject, in the 119th Psalm; see with what frequent repetition, and in what earnest terms, he declares the supreme satisfaction that he felt, in studying and doing the will of God. I would read passages to you, were they not so very numerous, merely to show you, in one signal instance, by the recorded sentiments of a man of true piety, what are the feelings of him, who obeys God through the motive of Love, and how very much more efficacious that principle must be, than any other. But although I refrain from occupying your time with all these quotations, I will take the liberty to request you to read that Psalm with attention, and serious minds, this very day. You will find it a perfect model of pious writing, and if, by the blessing and help of God, sought for in devout prayer, you catch a portion of the spirit which breathes throughout it, you will have derived

more practical benefit from this one short sentence of advice, that I have now given, than from the whole of my discourse besides.

But I will suppose you ready to grant, (what I am sure you cannot doubt) that Love is the firmest pillar of authority, and that they are always the most cheerful and faithful servants, who have an affection for their master; still you may say, we cannot feel such Love to God, merely because it is required of us; love cannot be forced into the heart, even by a divine command; it must grow out of an acquaintance with the person to be believed, out of a knowledge of his amiable qualities, out of a sense of gratitude for kindness felt towards us, and favours conferred upon us. Now "no man hath seen God at any time;" and how can we love Him whom we have not seen? He is a vast Spirit; His nature far above our comprehension; His paths so hidden, that we cannot trace Him; His dwelling so remote that we cannot approach Him. Can we "by searching find out God? Can we find out the Almighty unto perfection? it is as high as heaven; what can we do? deeper than hell; what can we know? the measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." As Pharoah asked of Moses—"Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" so we

in the same ignorance, may reasonably enquire, who is the Lord that we should love Him?

My brethren, were I a *heathen*, without any knowledge of a revelation, I could make no reply to these arguments; I should follow, perhaps, the example of that ancient philosopher, who when a certain King asked him for his opinion concerning the nature of the Deity, demanded a day to consider; at the expiration of that time, were the same question proposed, again, like him, I should demand two days more to reflect upon my answer; and so I should proceed, as often as you came to me for satisfaction, postponing my reply to a more distant period, and requesting more and more time for meditation; till at length, when wearied with my delay, you should insist on knowing the reason of my strange silence, I should fairly own with the wise man whom I have mentioned, my reason to be this;—"because the more I reflect upon the subject, the more obscure and difficult does it appear to me." I say, were I a heathen, unacquainted with such a book as the Bible, I think this is the course I should pursue. Were I to be asked why man ought to love God, I could not answer,—"because God created him;" for I should not know whether that creation were a blessing or a curse. I could not answer, because God loves him; for

seeing so much misery in the world, I should not know whether God loved or hated him. I could not answer, "because God designs him for happiness hereafter;" for I should be utterly ignorant whether there would be a future life, or if a future life, whether it would be a better or a worse condition than the present. In short, as I have already declared, I should be at a loss for an answer; for I should have no knowledge whatever on the subject. In the first place, I should not know whether even there were a God, though it might appear probable; if a God, whether one only, or many; if many, which was to be preferred; if one, whether he were the maker of man; if the maker of man, whether in love or malice he had made him. I should not know what services he required, how his favour was to be propitiated, nor how his displeasure to be averted. And when I say this would be my state of mind, upon that most interesting of all subjects to man, (in the case that I have supposed,) I mean to assert that this was the state of mind, of the heathen world generally; they did not love God, for they did not know Him; they wandered and were lost in the mazes of ignorance and error; they made Gods of every object of creation; they feared, and trembled, and bowed down in abject terror before

the fancies and the idols which they had set up for their deities; they worshipped cruel gods, and capricious gods, and libidinous gods, and covetous gods, gods quarrelling and contending for power among themselves, gods who were supposed to be slaves to every fierce and vile passion that infests the heart of man, gods in the shape of birds, and beasts, and fish, and reptiles, and vegetables, nay gods of wood, and gods of stone, that their own hands had made. You ask, were all men carried away by these deplorable superstitions? Truly, some few were more wise, and thought there *must* be a supreme Being, more worthy of adoration than those whom the generality blindly worshipped; but the wisest were like the philosopher of whom I spoke before, they *knew* nothing about the matter; and if they erected an altar, they could dedicate it only "to the unknown God." Modern unbelievers talk to us of the sufficiency of natural religion, without the gospel; but what natural religion really *is*, is to be learnt from the heathens of the ancient world, and in the present day; and a monstrous and most abominable system it is and ever was.

The natural religion, as it is falsely called, that exists in countries, where the doctrines of Christianity have been spread abroad, owes all

that it possesses of truth, and goodness, and purity, to the very Bible which it now rejects; there would have been *no* such religion, but for the Bible; and shameful is the unnatural ingratitude of the child that disowns its parent; it is (according to the apt and beautiful illustration of a pious prelate of our church,) "as if the withered hand, which Christ had restored, and made whole, were to be raised to smite him;" as if the dumb tongue, which he had loosened, were to employ its powers of utterance in railing at him; as if the impotent leg, which he had strengthened, were to lift up the heel against him; as if the blind eye, which he had enlightened, were to make the first use of its new faculty, in casting a glance of scorn at him. I repeat, that there could have been no true knowledge of God in the world, without a revelation; and we have ample proof of this, in the experience of the fact. There might have been a few traces of his character handed down from the earliest ages of mankind, and these few might have been selected by the wise, out of the immense mass of errors that obscured them, just as some passages of Scripture history may be discovered in the fables of the heathen religion; but, except for the Gospel, the natural religion of the world in general, would have been such as it was before

Christ, such as it *is* now, where Christianity has not yet imparted light and knowledge.

Let me now bring you back to the subject which gave rise to these observations. Having asserted the excellence of that first and great commandment, which makes love to God the motive of man's obedience to Him, I supposed you all ready to allow the truth of the remark, that affection is a much stronger support to authority, than power or terror; but I imagined it possible some might object, that there is such an immense distance and dissimilarity between God and man, that His nature is so far above our comprehension, that we cannot entertain such love for an invisible and unknown Being, merely because we are commanded to do so; that love must grow out of acquaintance with the object, out of a knowledge of something amiable, out of gratitude for kindness felt, and favours bestowed. In reply to this, I said that if I were a heathen, the objection would silence me immediately, that I could not give a reason why we should love a being whom we know not; and I maintained, that the heathens themselves *did* not love God, for that very reason, because they were ignorant of him.

But as a Christian, with the Bible in my hand, I can give you most solid and satisfactory

reasons, why we should love God, if you allow the truth of the book from whence my reasons are drawn. I can now say, because He has made himself known to us, as a Being of perfect Goodness, and the author of every good thing that we enjoy or hope for. I can now answer, because we know that He is our Father, who created us in love, and solely that we might be happy; our Redeemer, who in that character, and by that name, has bestowed upon us a blessing beyond all thought, and all expression great, having undertaken to save us, even by the sacrifice of Himself; our Sanctifier, always ready to qualify those who apply to him, for the enjoyment of the happiness which He offers; our Guardian, ever watching over us for our good; our Defender, ever at hand to support us, if we throw ourselves upon his protection, against the powerful temptations of the world, the sinful inclinations of our corrupt nature, and the snares and assaults of a malicious spirit, who studies to ruin us by every art; in short, our greatest and best Friend, who "first loved us," and who has faithfully promised, that if we will love *Him* in return, He will make us happy for ever, and bestow on us such good things as "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived." For the present, you have borne with me sufficiently, when we next meet, I propose to resume the subject.

Lord of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things, pour into our hearts the love of thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

# SERMON VIII.

## THE LOVE OF GOD.

DEUT. vi. 5.

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*

In the conclusion of my last discourse I briefly enumerated the reasons which the Scriptures furnish, why we should love God. I propose, on the present occasion, to enlarge a little upon these reasons; secondly to show you what will be the natural effects of that love, sincerely entertained.

First, what are the considerations that should excite us to the love of God.

My brethren, I address you of course as Christians, not as persons who are totally ignorant of the nature and dealings of God, as the

heathens were, but as persons who believe in the truth of that sacred book, wherein He has vouchsafed to reveal so much of Himself to mankind, as it is expedient for them to know. Except on the authority of that book, I could not venture to reason with you on such a subject at all; for without a revelation, how could I possibly know any thing about God? How could I know that He created man, or what his purpose was? How could I tell whether He were not a malevolent being, who had made us in sport, just to tantalize us with a vision of happiness, that we might the more acutely feel the reality of misery? How could I be sure that He did not design us *all* for a state of hopeless torment hereafter, having given us a perception of enjoyment, and a taste of pleasure upon earth, merely for the purpose of increasing our pangs in another world, by the bitter recollection of the delights which we had experienced, and by the miserable knowledge of our capacity for a higher condition? Or if He had determined within His own bosom a rule, according to which He would distribute His rewards, and His punishments, in a future life, how could I penetrate into the secrets of His counsels, and say what that rule might be? How could I inform those, who desired to serve him, of what nature

those services ought to be, and whether the methods which they took to please Him, might not be such as would give him most offence? Nay, how could I possibly tell, whether there would be any life at all hereafter, and whether the grave would not be the humiliating end of miserable and distracted man? I might have opinions on these subjects, but what should I *know?* No more than I know what may now be taking place in some distant planet, or how God has employed Himself in the past ages of Eternity. In short nothing could be *known* of God, or of his dealings with man, except by his own express communication, and "an unknown God" could be no object of love, nor was He loved by those, who ignorantly worshipped "they knew not whom."

But, "blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear; for verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." You know, in the first place, concerning the nature of God, that He is a Being of infinite perfection, infinite in power, in wisdom, in justice, in goodness; you know that He is the sole Creator and Governor of this vast universe, consisting of un-

numbered worlds, giving to them all their laws, and guiding them entirely by his Almighty word; and (what brings Him nearer to ourselves,) that He is the maker of man, and exercises a providential care over him; that "in Him we live, and move, and have our being;" that our existence wholly depends on Him, who is ever present with us; that whatever we enjoy of health, and strength, and comfort, whatever delight we experience through the ministry of our various senses, whatever rational pleasure we are capable of deriving, from the inexhaustible beauties and wonders of nature, whatever pure satisfaction from the endearments of friendly intercourse with one another, we have received them all from His liberal bounty, and can retain them only at His pleasure.

If man were at this hour, such as he was at first created, a being "in the image of God," innocent and happy, with all his feelings and passions in subjection to the reason which was given to direct and controul them, unmolested by pain of body, free from anxiety and distress of mind, and no death in the prospect, to discourage him in all his enjoyments, the love of that God, who had showered upon him such abundant blessings, would be the first law of his nature, and obedience to it his greatest happi-

ness. With what admiration would he contemplate all the proofs of his wisdom and goodness, displayed in the wonderful works of Creation! With what thankfulness would he acknowledge the invaluable benefit of so happy an existence! With what filial affection would he revere so kind and indulgent a father! What a pride would he consider it, to be intimately united with so great and good a Being! With what unwearied zeal would he study to please him in all things! In what lively and exalted strains would he bless Him for the mercies he hourly received! With what intenseness of prayer would he implore the continuance of his love! What supreme satisfaction would he feel in the assurance of his constant presence, and ever watchful care! And if such a thought could enter his mind, how melancholy would it be to imagine himself for a moment separated from HIM, the fountain of his life and happiness, the origin and the medium of every delight he experienced, the spring of every pleasurable emotion, the heart of his heart, the soul of his soul! Without HIM, he could not conceive the possibility of enjoyment; all would be cheerless and wretched, light would be darkness, order would be confusion, beauty would be deformity, love would be hatred, food would be poison, music would be

discord, every thing would be (to his perception) the reverse of what it was before, through the absence of the "Parent of Good," whose presence alone could make it what it was.

Such would be the feelings of man, had he remained in a state of purity and innocence. God would be every thing to him, not merely the perfection, but the very essence of his Being; and happiness without God, would be as inconceivable as life without breath. But alas! what a work has sin wrought! how has it severed man from his Maker! how has it effaced from his mind, that divine "image and superscription" which stamped him as God's own! We can now live "without God in the world," yet think ourselves happy! we can now go grovelling upon the earth, with brute unconscious gaze, beholding all the wonders of Almighty power and wisdom, so profusely spread around us, and observe not Him, "mark not the hand unseen" that works in every process of nature, nor trace that universal spirit which pervades, and animates, and sustains, the whole fabric of Creation! We can enjoy life, and health, and strength, yet feel no gratitude to the "author and giver of all good things;" we can labour without the least thought of depending on his assistance for success; we can indulge in hopes unsanctified

by a single wish for his blessing; we can be disturbed by fear without flying to Him for protection; we can be grieved, and seek no comfort from Him; we can be disappointed, and not acknowledge his interposition for our good. In short, we can account for every thing without God, do every thing without God, possess every thing without God; God is banished from the world, and man is "all in all."

Such did man become by rebellion; such consequently is every man by nature; no longer living *in* God, nay, not merely *without* God, but absolutely at *enmity* with God; like some disordered piece of mechanism, whose movements are in direct opposition to the main spring, which ought to regulate them; cherishing thoughts, and indulging in practices most contrary to His pure holiness; perversely endeavouring to extract good out of that which he has appointed to be evil; seeking happiness from what he has ordained to be sources of misery; loving what God hates, and hating what God loves. Oh! how he needs above all things to have the love of God shed abroad in his heart, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Surely then we should naturally suppose, since man thus rejected God, God also would

reject him, and give him up to perish by his own devices, and to find the evil that he sought.

Such would be the conduct of man towards his fellow; he would cast him off at once, and let him suffer for his ingratitude. But God's "ways are not our ways, nor his thoughts our thoughts." "God is love," and though the rebellion of man called for punishment, that punishment was counteracted by a great display of mercy; the offended proposed reconciliation, in return for war, He proclaimed conditions of peace, hatred He repaid with good-will, the defiance of sin He answered with a declaration of pardon.

You require not now, as if for the first time in your lives, to be informed of this miracle of love. You all believe that it was actually manifested for your sakes; you believe that "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him might not perish, but have everlasting life." You know that you are sinners, both by nature and by habit, and therefore subject to the just anger of God, and that you would have perished in your sins, without the least capability of saving yourselves, or of recovering the lost favour of God, by any personal satisfaction or exertions of your own,

but that God made the first advances, and in his mercy provided a method of salvation, wholly proceeding from his own free love, and not in return for any merits or worthiness that He saw in man, who was altogether alienated from him, and become a debtor to his justice. I suppose you to believe all this, because I address not myself to you as if any of you were either deniers of the Gospel, or advocates of that strange system of Christianity, (so nearly allied to infidelity) which can overlook or explain away that most striking, most explicit, most merciful, most comfortable doctrine of the Gospel, the atonement for sin, or even as if you were careless about your creed, and indifferent to religion altogether. I rather desire to consider you all as fully believing in the Gospel, as disciples too, not of a mere preacher of righteousness, on a par with Moses, and Elijah, and John the Baptist, but of a crucified Saviour, (as you, outwardly at least, testify by your adherence to a Church which, in all her forms and services, makes that a fundamental article of her faith) and moreover as having that sense of the necessity and importance of religion, of which your presence in a place of worship surely ought to be, and I trust *is*, a sign. In this character then I address you; and I ask you, as Christians, as called by the name of Him,

through whose merits alone you confess that you hope for redemption, whether God has not now the clearest and strongest title to your love and gratitude? I say God; for I distinguish not between those two persons of the mysterious Trinity, the Father and the Son, united in one work of love; but I take the Scripture account that "*God was in Christ*, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." So that the love of God and our blessed Saviour cannot be divided, as directed towards two different persons, but is one and the same sentiment, with one and the same being for its object. Is not this God then, so revealed to you in the Gospel, worthy of your sincerest love? God, who would not be repelled by the enmity of man, but showed most friendship, when most insulted and forsaken? God, who offers forgiveness to the vilest sinners, if they will but accept it on his easy terms? God, who is willing to restore us to the favour which we seemed to have no hope of regaining, and to bestow upon us in heaven that eternity of happiness which we had justly forfeited upon earth? God, who leaves no means untried to persuade us to return to him, but calls us by his word, by the suggestions of his Holy Spirit, by his warnings, by his blessings, by his afflictions? God, who waiteth to be

gracious, and endures so long the forgetfulness and impiety of sinful and perverse man, that he may finally come to repentance? Oh! if we truly believe this, (which we all profess to believe) shall we not with most lively gratitude accept his mercy? Shall we not each of us say "praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all *his* benefits, who forgiveth all thy sins?" Shall we not love him, as he deserves to be loved, with "all our heart, and all our soul, and all our might?"

I asked not, shall we not *obey* him? but, shall we not *love* him? for Love is a sufficient security for our obedience. Mere obedience without love, implies the reluctant performance of irksome duties; it is a slavery, not a willing service; the tardy labour extorted by disagreeable constraint, not the forward alacrity exhibited by a free and happy mind. It is most contrary to the spirit, with which a Christian should display his zeal in God's service. What if you crawl slowly and unwillingly to the house of prayer twice every Sabbath day, and sit for hours, most patient martyrs to the duties of your religion? The laborious effort not proceeding from any pious desire, might have been spared with equal advantage; it was not required of you, it is of no use, it has no religion in it, it is not acceptable to God; the time is thrown

away, and you lose the opportunities of more pleasing engagements. What if you daily endure the dulness of reading the Bible, or some religious book? Oh! I might well say it is an idle task, a knowledge of God's word is not so attained; bestow your precious moments on some more delightful study. What if every morning and evening you submit to the habitual repetition of some formal prayers? foolish constraint! there is no devotion in it—it brings down no blessing; begin and end your day without that needless ceremony. What if you occasionally toil through a tedious visit to the sick and afflicted? vain exertion! hasten rather with joyous hearts to the "house of feasting," where you may indulge, not force your feelings. What if from half closed hands, that grudgingly strive to retain their hold, you suffer a small portion of your riches to escape into the pockets of the needy? it is to you a wasteful expenditure; it is not Charity, it "profiteth nothing;" there is no treasure laid up in heaven thereby, it is not "lent unto the Lord;" it will never be repaid you again; reserve it rather for your own pleasures.

My brethren, in our duty towards God, as well as towards man, (duties that cannot be separated, but always go hand in hand) "*love* is the fulfilling of the law." Religious services per-

formed under a sense of constraint, have no value in them. God is not a hard tyrant, who collects exactions from his oppressed subjects, but a kind Father, who is pleased with freewill offerings from his affectionate children. He gives in Love, in Love he wishes to be repaid; it is not external actions, but the heart that he requires. A whole life may be spent in painful duties, performed with a cold feeling of mere obligation, and in the direction of that whole life, religion will have had no share. They, who went on weary pilgrimages to the holy sepulchre, with their affections all the while calling them back to their own homes, and they, who lacerated their own bodies with self-inflicted scourgings, groaning under every stroke, and anxious for the termination of their voluntary punishments, performed services just as pleasing to God, as these do who frequent his house, however punctually, with disinclination in their hearts —who labour through the Scriptures, however minutely, with aversion and distaste—who repeat a constant routine of prayers, however regularly, with tediousness—who give alms to the poor, however largely, with aching bosoms—in short, who make their religious exercises, of whatever sort, a toilsome drudgery. You will hear a man ask, how much attention to such and such a

duty does God require of me? what degree of strictness in this or that particular is necessary? how often am I *bound* to be present at his public worship? how much of my time must I devote to the study of the Bible? how long and frequent ought my prayers to be? what sort of observance am I *obliged* to pay to the Sabbath? what proportion of my money *must* I bestow upon the poor? and such-like questions, implying that he feels himself under a compulsory religion, whose demands he would gladly reduce to the smallest possible amount. To such a man I would reply, nothing at all is required of you in that spirit; leave all these severe duties alone, if you find no pleasure in them; God rejects your heartless homage, and desires none of the sacrifices which you offer with so much pain. He asks your Love; measure your obedience by that, and that alone; *it* will easily determine every question of duty. If there be no Love, it is quite indifferent what you do upon other principles; and if there be Love, even should you have no opportunity of testifying it by outward actions, the "willing heart" is equally dear to Him.

And need I, in conclusion, once more remind you what a call he has made upon your love? Need I again remind you of your sins, and of the forgiveness which is offered to them? Need I

again direct your views to your Saviour, patiently enduring the bitter agony of the Cross, solely that man might not suffer for his offences, that fallen and sinful man might be freely admitted to the joy and glory of eternal life in heaven? "Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?" Oh where is the hard heart that cannot be softened, the cold heart that cannot be warmed, the closed heart that cannot be opened, by the thoughts of such mercy as this? Who can remain a formal and reluctant worshipper at the very foot of the Cross, on which the greatest instance of love was displayed, that ever was exhibited to the world. Shame on such false religion, such constrained devotion. The Lord direct your hearts into the "love of God," and excite and enable you to serve him always with true affection and willing obedience. And "ye beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal life." Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. *Amen.*

# SERMON IX.

## SEEKING THE LORD.

ISAIAH, lv. 6, 7.

***Seek ye the Lord while he may be found,*** *call ye* ***upon him, while he is near:***

***Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto*** *the Lord,* ***and he will have mercy upon him; and to our*** *God, for* ***he will abundantly pardon.***

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THESE words partake of a character which belongs to the Scriptures at large; they are addressed both to the hopes and to the fears of man; for while they express a most consoling truth, they at the same time imply a most alarming one. On the one hand it is declared that there is with God mercy, and abundant pardon for the penitent sinner; on the other, it is signified that

there *may be* a time when the Lord will no longer be found of them that seek him, and will no longer be near to them that call upon Him; a time when, instead of receiving the prodigal with open arms to his paternal love, he will indignantly repel him with those dreadful words, "Depart from me, I know you not;" a time, when the wretched man who has wilfully resigned his Christian "birth-right" for the trifling pleasures of the world, will, with Esau, be rejected if he afterward desire "to inherit the blessing," and "find no place for repentance, though *he* seek it carefully with tears."

The minister of the Gospel should never lose sight of this two-fold character of the word *of* God. "It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful;" he must be faithful alike in dispensing the treasures of his master's love, and in setting forth the threatenings of his anger; and while he delights in the execution of that pleasing part of his duty, which consists in inviting all that "labour and are heavy laden" to accept the gracious offers of spiritual rest and happiness, while he joyfully undertakes the office of a "Comforter of God's people," while it is his greatest happiness to be appointed as the bearer of "good tidings," to declare that "with the Lord is mercy, and with him is plenteous

redémption," to proclaim with Isaiah, "Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters," and to be able to say with David, "I have not kept back thy loving-mercy and truth from the great congregation," still he must not shrink from the more painful, but equally important task which his commission imposes on him, of endeavouring to alarm and disturb the secure and careless sinner, by a solemn representation of the danger he is in of falling under the severity of God's justice, if he wilfully "neglect so great salvation." "Knowing the terrors of the Lord," he should earnestly labour to "persuade men," by the most awakening appeals to their fears, that they "make haste to escape" from the impending ruin, and "flee" with all their speed "from the wrath to come."

And it is an unhappy fact, that it is this, the most painful part (as I have said) of his commission, which requires his most frequent, and most zealous exertion; and that the circumstances of his hearers generally render it necessary, that he should be almost studiously cautious in his mode of exhibiting that very doctrine, which, if they were duly qualified to receive it, it would be his greatest joy to publish. I would not be needlessly severe; but I put it to your candid consideration, whether the greater

part of men are in such a state of mind, as to want for their comfort any lively and forcible representation of the *mercy* of God? Has the sense of their unworthiness and sin, reduced them to that humble, fearful, and anxious frame, which calls for powerful arguments of consolation and encouragement? are their "souls so athirst after God," that nothing will satisfy them, but to be conducted to the "fountain of living waters?" Have their "sins taken such hold upon them," that "their heart hath failed them," and they dare not "so much as lift their eyes unto heaven," but require to have their drooping spirits supported by the assurance, that "though their sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool? Is this, I ask, the state of mind *most prevalent* among those whom the minister has to address? Is the general character of his audience such, that his discourses ought for the most part to be so framed as to meet the case of the trembling penitent? Is it required that he should propose it as the principle object of his endeavours, "to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones?"

I fear that if, in our preaching, we take chiefly into consideration the circumstances of

the majority of those who hear us, and consult principally (as we ought) their instruction and advantage, we shall more usually adopt a line of argument suited to quite an opposite class. I fear it will appear to be more incumbent upon us, that we use our efforts to awaken and alarm, than to soothe and console; more necessary, that we should tell them of their danger, than of their safety; of an offended God, than of a loving Father; of a severe Judge, than of a merciful Redeemer; of a "grieved" Spirit, who may be provoked to desert them, than of a willing Comforter, who will always abide with, and sustain them; of the condemnation due to sin, than of the forgiveness purchased for it; of the awfulness of death, rather than of the consolation with which it may be supported; of the terrors of the Day of Judgment, rather than of the triumphs, and the crown of glory to be then enjoyed.

For it is a comparatively *rare* case to meet with an humble and dejected penitent, who needs the comforts of the Gospel. It is rare in the days of youth and of health; and it is rare, (I speak from experience,) even on the death bed of those, who may have spent a long life unaffected by any serious thoughts about religion. The more ordinary state of mind is that of carelessness, security, confidence, presump-

tion; and our more common task is to labour to "convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment." The character of men in general, is to be void of fear and anxiety about their salvation; they too readily assure themselves of their safety; their consciences are too easily set at rest; they "speak peace" to them, where "there is no peace;" they invest the Almighty, through the error of their own vague imaginations, with an attribute of undistinguishing compassion, which excludes the ideas of holiness and justice, and more nearly resembles the softness of a weak human mind, than the glorious perfection of Divine mercy; and hence they deduce unfounded, unscriptural hopes of pardon and eternal life; they hope to be saved, (if that may be called hope, which is rather a mere occasional thought, admitted indolently and without enquiry, than a strong and permanent feeling, warranted by Christian views,) they hope to be saved, upon grounds, which, if they were just, would reduce our religion to an idle fiction, a mere nursery tale, invented to disturb our childish minds with causeless fears; for in their system, there seems not to be the very slightest impediment in the road from Earth to Heaven; with these, the frailty of man is a ready apology for every sin, and the mercy of God a

security against all punishment. They have no fears therefore to be calmed, no troubled consciences to be pacified; all is tranquil and composed within their bosoms. And why? Are their hearts and lives such as the Gospel requires? Nay, that were too much to expect of human infirmity. Has God uttered no denunciation against those, who do not sincerely devote themselves to his service? "Yes, but his mercy, say they, will overlook all our defects." Has the Gospel then been revealed in vain? In vain indeed, if these are in the way of salvation, for their easy and accommodating religion wears none of the features of Christianity.

While therefore men with so little consideration, lay claim to those hopes, to which their character gives them no title, and which, in fact, belong exclusively to the sincere Christian, you will think, with me, that it is imperative upon the preacher often to lay aside for awhile his office of messenger of good news, and the "Publisher of Salvation," and rather to assume the severe and threatening style, which the Scriptures in such cases warrant. And I do most solemnly call upon *you*, who may be now indulging a hope, which will one day "make ashamed," and who are building, on a foundation of sand, houses which must soon fall to ruin, to reflect

that the mercy of God, revealed in his own word, is a very different Attribute from that which you have imagined to yourselves. It is not to be appropriated to himself by every careless and presumptuous man ; it is not, what you would wish it to be, an *infirmity* of the Divine nature, which will influence the Almighty to bestow his favours upon all who need them, however much they may neglect, and provoke, and trifle with Him; it does not furnish an assurance of universal impunity for all sin, as well that which is loved and persisted in, as that which is repented of and forsaken; it is one of the mysterious qualities of God's infinite perfection, of which we can have no other knowledge, than such as it has pleased him to communicate, and of which, therefore, we must not allow ourselves to draw any other character, than such as the Scriptures warrant. Search those Scriptures, and you will find that the mercy of God does not mean indiscriminate forgiveness and favour, but that He, who has said, "I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy," has also said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay."

Need I mention to you *instances* of his vengeance? Need I tell you of the angels who kept not their first estate, but are reserved in chains under darkness until the judgment of the

great day? Of the condemnation of all mankind for the offences of one? Of the drowning of the old world? Of the destruction of the cities of the plain by fire and brimstone? Of the earth opening her mouth, and swallowing up thousands of rebellious men? Of the extermination by fire and the sword, and disease, and famine, not only of idolatrous Gentiles, but even of multitudes of God's own chosen people? But these examples of wrath were exhibited before the gospel-times, you will say, and we are under the covenant of grace and mercy. Nay, my brethren, but "with God is no variableness, neither shadow of turning," and "the Lamb" whose blood alone has ever availed to check the hand of divine justice, was in purpose "slain before the foundation of the world;" so that God's mercy is the very same quality now, that it was before the sacrifice of the Cross. Are the promises less mingled with threats in the Gospel, than they were in the law and the prophets? Do you not read, even in the pages of the covenant of grace itself, continual denunciations of punishment? Do you not read of "the worm that dieth not, and of the fire that is not quenched?" Of "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth?" Of the "resurrection of damnation?" Of "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that

doeth evil?" Of "the death, which is the wages of sin?" Of "the Lord Jesus being revealed from heaven with his mighty Angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power?" Yes, the dreadful day *will* come when unhappy persons of this description will wish they could "hide themselves in the rocks, and in the dens of the mountains, from the "awakened wrath" of that very "Lamb" who was slain "to take away the sins of the world." The day will come when mercy herself, having been too long slighted, will plead for an aggravation of punishment; when Redemption will be the cause of heavier condemnation, when the Saviour himself will be a Judge, and when He, who now says to all, "ask and ye shall have, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you," will reply to multitudes, (who in an agony will knock and cry, "Lord, Lord, open unto us,") the door is shut, I know you not, depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity."

Now what do all these alarming passages of Scripture, which I have quoted, mean, if the mercy of God be of that weak character which careless and presumptuous men delude their

consciences by ascribing to it? Why all these idle threats, if sinners may still "walk on in the ways of their heart, and in the sight of their eyes," without any fear that "for all these things God will bring them into judgment," and, to the end, comfort themselves with the thought that mercy must step in between them and vengeance? Do not such thoughts charge the Most High with mockery and deceit? But "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor the son of man, that he should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" Oh be assured that He "will not alter the thing that is once gone out of his lips," but that He will as certainly execute his threats upon those who shall be so miserable as to incur his anger, as He will perform his promises to those who shall be found fit objects of his mercy.

"But the day of final rejection, you say, is very distant, and we have yet much time for repentance." The day of judgment *may* be very distant, though we know not that; but the day of final rejection may be very near. Who knows that it may not be nearer even than the day of death, which cannot be far off? Have you ever considered those words of our blessed Saviour, "I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall

die in your sins?" or those of God, spoken by the mouth of Solomon, "then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer, they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me?" Have you not heard of "grieving and quenching" the Holy Spirit? Know you not that although "the Lord's hand is never shortened, that it cannot save, neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear, yet your iniquities may separate between you and your God, and your sins may hide his face from you, that he *will* not hear?" Is it not written of sinners who have become hardened in impenitence, "this people's heart is waxed gross, and heir ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes nave they closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and be converted, and I should heal them?" Know you not that there is a case of inveterate sin described in the Bible, in which reformation is as hopeless, as that the Ethiopian should change his skin, or the leopard his spots? I go not beyond the word of God, nor would I have ventured to suggest the possibility of such a dreadful state of reprobation occurring on this side of the grave, had I not my authority to produce. But you have heard the language of Scripture itself; and it corresponds with the intimation conveyed in my text, "Seek

ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near," which words certainly imply that He is not always to be found, nor always near. "Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, to day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness, when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years; wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, they do always err in their heart, and they have not known my ways; so I sware in my wrath, they shall not enter into my rest. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of *you* an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, whilst it is called to day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

This is a subject worthy of your most serious consideration; you know that the usual argument against delay in the work of religion, is the great uncertainty of life; and a most forcible argument that surely is, addressed to beings who cannot call a moment their own. But how often is it disregarded, merely because it is possible that death may yet be distant, and they may still have many years to live! But granting now the possibility of these many years, is there no fear that habits of sin and carelessness will go on

increasing with the length of time, until your salvation shall be as hopeless as if you were this day to be cut off in your impenitence? Is there no fear that God may depart from those who refuse so long to draw near unto him? Is it certain that he will afford the same assistance to the very last, however obstinately it may have been rejected hitherto, which he offered at the beginning? Or if *He* is ready to *afford* it, that the sinner will be in an equal capacity to avail himself of it? May not the heart become at length like the beaten way-side, so hard that the seed which falls upon it will but lie on the surface, and so be liable to be snatched away by the devil, the moment that it is sown? The Spirit of God, you say, is equal to any work, however great. Most true; but if you wilfully increase the magnitude of that work, is it for you to presume upon the superior assistance which you will have thus rendered necessary? Doubtless "with God all things are possible," and He could, in an instant, convert the most hardened sinner into the most pious Christian; but the question with us is not what He *can* do, but what his word gives *us* reason to hope that he *will* do; and you have heard from those Scriptures, from which alone we can have any information concerning the method of his dealings with man, what danger

there is that the heart *may* be hardened in final and hopeless impenitence.

It is dreadful to imagine the possibility of such a state; and may it, through God's help, be far from every one of us! A *speedy* repentance is our only security against it; but of this we may be quite certain, that no true penitent will ever be rejected; of this we may be quite certain, that as long as the wicked *can* forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and *can* turn unto the Lord, He will have mercy upon him, and will abundantly pardon him." He who gives the heart to repent, and the power to turn to God, is still "willing to save." He would not even "begin that good work," if He had "shut up his loving kindness in displeasure," and did not still "wait to be gracious."

Therefore, let no man despair, who feels any emotion of that "godly sorrow, which leadeth to repentance;" for if he sincerely repents, it is not the multitude, or the enormity of his former sins, that will exclude him from the mercy of God; if he anxiously desires to return, it is not the distance, that he has wandered from him that will quench the affection of his Father's heart; it is enough that he repents and returns; "dead," though he was, "in tres-

passes and sins," it is enough that he is "alive again;" "lost" though he was, and gone far astray, it is enough that he is "found;" all the past is pardoned and forgotten; his "transgressions are blotted out like a cloud, and like a thick cloud his sins;" whatever they were, he has at last found his way to the bosom of that Saviour, who has paid their penalty, and to whom whosoever cometh, he shall in no wise be cast out.

# SERMON X.

## PARDON PROMISED TO FORSAKEN SIN.

ISAIAH lv. 7.

***Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.***

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ALTHOUGH the text on which I last addressed you, comprised the words which I have now read, yet my discourse was almost wholly confined to a subject suggested by the verse which precedes them,—"Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near;" words, which, as I observed, certainly imply that it is possible to seek the Lord when he may not be found, and to call upon him when he is afar off; and I endeavoured to prove

this truth to you, from other passages of Scripture, calculated to excite the fears of men, which represent that obstinate sin and impenitence may provoke even the God of mercy and compassion to abandon them in this world, and to punish them eternally hereafter. You may have thought my observations too severe; you may have thought it inconsistent with the character of him, to whom, by his office, is committed the "ministry of reconciliation," that he should address you in the language of hostility and vengeance; perhaps it may have seemed, that since the very word "Gospel" signifies "good news," a preacher of it should not have so departed from the design of his appointment, as to become the bearer of evil tidings; that a sentence of condemnation did not sound well from the lips of a publisher of salvation, and that the sword of war ill suited those hands which should have borne the olive branch of peace; in short, that I should have acted more in accordance with the purpose of my commission, if I had abstained from all such alarming topics, and studied rather how to comfort and encourage you, by speaking of love, and mercy, and forbearance, and pardon, and eternal life. And most happy should I be, could I think that there was no occasion ever to use any other language in this place; most happy,

could I believe that my duty would be performed in only administering the comfort, and displaying the promises of the Gospel; for unfeeling must be his mind, who would wilfully disturb, with causeless apprehension and anxiety, the bosoms which he might have left to the enjoyment of their composure; and ungrateful his heart, who, founding his own hopes on the infinite *mercy* of God, should represent Him to others, as an angry and terrible Avenger. But the several expressions which I employed, were the language of Scripture, and (to adopt the words of Balaam,) "I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord, to do less or more." "Must I not take heed to speak that which the Lord hath put in my mouth?" Must not he who would be "a faithful steward of the mysteries of God," preach the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, exactly as he finds it revealed? Can he, without sin, add aught thereto, or diminish aught therefrom, either to gratify his own feelings, or to avoid disquieting the consciences of those who have no right to the repose, in which, to their own great peril, they indulge?

Hear what God said to the prophet Ezekiel, "Son of Man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore hear the

word of my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked thou shalt surely die, and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand." If then you were in so sinful a state of mind, as not to be able to "endure sound doctrine," but were like the Israelites of old, who would not "hear the law of the Lord," and who said to the Seers, see not, and to the Prophets, prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits;" if, I say, you were then disposed to object to the sincere and honest exposition of God's word, in its simple and undisguised truth, what, in such a case, would be the duty of your minister? To use the boldness which Micaiah exhibited before the wicked tyrant Ahab, "not to prophesy good concerning you, but evil," and which animated Peter, and the other apostles, when, being called to account before the High Priest, and the council of the Jews, for having preached the prohibited doctrines of the Gospel, they resolutely answered, "we ought to obey God rather than man;" for the obligation is still as imperative as ever, upon every one who acts as it were the part of an ambassador from God to the world,

"thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear." It is a sin pregnant with danger both to the preacher and to his hearers, when he endeavours to "heal the hurt of the people slightly," and "sees visions of peace for them, where there is no peace;" for God will "break down the wall that has been daubed with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundation thereof shall be discovered," and both he that builded it, and they that trusted in it, shall be consumed.

It was in compliance then with that important duty, which makes it incumbent upon the minister of religion, that he "shun not to declare the whole counsel of God," that in my last discourse, I adopted the *severe* style of scripture, and appealed to your fears, by speaking of an offended God, and of a just Judge, and of the condemnation of sin, and of man first hardened by evil habits, then abandoned by the Holy Spirit, and finally delivered over into the hands of the eternal tormentors. And although it were better far that men should be won over to God's service by arguments of an opposite nature, by a sense of his goodness and mercy towards them, by a perception of the loveliness of piety, by an earnest desire to please God, and to have, in

some measure, restored to their souls, the lost image of his perfection, and by a longing after the pure and holy happiness of heaven; although it were far more desirable that they should be attracted by a gentle and pleasing influence, than thrust forward by a violent and painful impulse; yet, since there are unhappily those, whom "none of these things move," persons, to whom God in vain "stretches forth his hands all the day long;" who will not come to Him, though invited with the offers of peace and joy, but "reject his counsel against themselves," and "despise the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering," it becomes absolutely necessary that Mercy should sometimes cease to whisper in her "still, small voice" of love, and that Justice should take up her trumpet, and, with an awakening blast, proclaim the terrors of divine wrath; and I doubt not, since God has thought good to use expressions of anger, as well as of kindness, and to address men with threatenings as well as with promises, that this is a method, by which many a sinner is first checked in his evil course, and made to tremble at the prospect of perdition, as a preparatory step to that comfort, and "peace in believing," which he will be afterwards allowed to derive from the conviction of his being pardoned

and redeemed; indeed, perhaps in most cases, a perception of danger precedes the "assured hope" of safety, and the fear of hell is an introduction to the hope of heaven.

My brethren, if there *is* danger of provoking God to anger, and of falling under the sentence of condemnation at the day of judgment, it is any thing but unkind, it is an act of the greatest charity to warn men of it, and to show them the way to escape. And is there none? Does it exist only in the perverted imagination of the fearful, the melancholy, and the superstitious? Or is it a bugbear set up to keep the world in awe, and to alarm those from their sins, who could not otherwise be reclaimed? Is God in real truth (what some by their fearless security seem to have represented him to their own minds) a Being of such weakness and inconstancy, that though he has given men the strictest laws, and denounced his displeasure against all who transgress them, He yet is indifferent whether they be observed or not, and will treat those who obey, and those who rebel, with equal favour? Is there no such thing as punishment in the system of the divine economy? And, whatever we may have been in this world, are we *all* to be partakers of mercy and happiness, and Heaven hereafter? What authority can we pro-

duce for this opinion? Not the Scriptures; for among all the errors which misinterpretation has ever deduced from them, this at least is too palpable ever to find a place. All that men can plead for such an unscriptural belief is, that they think God surely is too merciful to visit the frailties and infirmities of such imperfect creatures with heavy chastisement. But then, I ask again, whence this flattering notion of his mercy? What information have you on the subject, so as to be able to judge of the nature of that divine Attribute, except in the pages of revelation? You can know nothing of his mercy without the Bible, and when brought to that test you must perceive that your conceptions are erroneous. Nay, we need no Bible, no religion, laws are nugatory, threats are ridiculous, holiness and sin are alike indifferent, if this character of the Almighty be true. You increase ten-fold the mystery both of the divine nature and of human life, by such a supposition; for if God have not an infinite aversion to sin, how can He be infinitely holy? and if imperfect in holiness, how can he be God? And as to human life, if man be not in a probationary state, to his conduct in which his future condition will bear some relation, can you imagine for what object he is made to sojourn for awhile in this strange world, where

at all events he *is* tried and disciplined, even if no important consequences depend on the success or failure of his education?

But, you enquire, with whom am I contending? With a large class, I fear; with all those whose loose ideas concerning the mercy of God tend to deprive sin of its malignity and deformity, to represent it as neither offensive nor dangerous, consequently to lower the importance of the work of repentance, and to detract from the excellence and necessity of holiness. My Brethren, *we* think too lightly of sin, and then wickedly "supposing God to be in that respect" even "such an one as ourselves," we fondly dream that He too holds it in equally light estimation; so, instead of being tremblingly alive to its guilt, anxiously fearful of incurring its pollution, and of deserving its bitter consequences, and therefore watching and praying against temptation, instead of this, we fall into it carelessly, or even choose it deliberately, and if ever a passing sentiment of shame and remorse, or a slight apprehension of danger should cross our minds, "man is weak, and God is merciful," are the thoughts which at once banish all sorrow and fear, confirm us in our security and presumption, and leave our hopes of Salvation (such as they are) unshaken and unimpaired.

Still does the same tempter, who "brought death into the world, and all our woe," by persuading our first parents, that God would not execute his threats against disobedience, and daring to say "ye shall *not* surely die," when God had already said "ye *shall* surely die," still does *he* constantly employ the same artifice, and whisper into our too accessible minds, an assurance that sin is not really so dangerous as the word of revelation declares. Although he does not add now, as in that first temptation, "for God doth know, that in the day ye transgress, then shall your eyes be opened, and ye shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil," because he is aware that, through his own malicious teaching, men are but too deeply instructed in that mystery, and know by bitter experience the good they have lost, and the evil they have found, yet with equal subtlety, and too often with equal success, he accompanies his temptations with an assurance that they may be safely listened to, for that God's favour will not be diminished thereby, nor the way to Heaven impeded. And how frequently does he artfully endeavour to render ineffectual the very work of that "seed of the woman," who came to "bruise his head," by representing that Christians especially are free to sin, being provided with an immunity from all

its penalties! But "he was a liar from the beginning," and in no case has he acted more consistently with that character, than when he has pretended to find encouragement for sin in the Christian doctrine of redemption, and sought to pass off his own wickedness under the sanction of that holy name, which is most irreconcileably opposed to him. Never was a more gross delusion, I should rather have said blasphemous impiety, than that, which so exhibits the blessed truth of the Atonement, as to make Christ appear "the minister of sin." Never was any good gift more shamefully abused and perverted, than the grace of God is, when it is supposed to countenance and foster the vices and corruptions of impenitent man. If to ascribe the merciful works, which our Saviour did by divine power, to the author of all evil, be the one unpardonable sin, there cannot be much less enormity in so far attributing to God the works of Satan, as to imagine that at least he rather patronises and approves, than disallows and condemns them; by its consequences at least, if not in its own nature, this sin also seems incapable of forgiveness, inasmuch as it encourages men to continue in a course which must end in ruin, and leads them really to reject the mercy of God, while they presumptuously rely upon it.

But it does not enter into my thoughts to suspect any one among you of deliberately holding the opinion that we may the more securely sin, "because we are not under the law, but under grace." The Scriptures are surely too explicit on that head, and you are too well acquainted with them, to be at all liable to so fatal an error. My only fear is, lest there should be some persons among you, who may inconsiderately and carelessly embrace one part of the Gospel to the detriment of the other part; who may hope to obtain "remission of their sins," without repentance; to "enter into life" without keeping the commandments; to "see the Lord" without holiness; to enjoy ultimately all the *blessings* of Christianity, though they have never been adorned with the *graces* of the Christian character; in short, who may quiet their consciences, in the midst of a thoughtless, and sinful, and faithless life, with all that the Gospel says about mercy and forgiveness, and omit to apply to themselves any thing which it says about repentance and newness of heart and life, and piety, and purity, and self-denial. My fear is, lest any of you should forget that the promises are made to *believing* and *penitent* Christians, and appropriate them to yourselves, even in a state of unbelief, and impenitence, and rebellion; lest

you should think that the servants of mammon will participate with the servants of God; that those who "stand all the day idle" will receive the same wages as those who go into the vineyard and work; that the prodigal will be forgiven, even though he returns not to his Father's house; that they will share in the marriage feast who have refused the invitation to it; that they will be received as children of the bride-chamber, even though they have no oil in their lamps, when the bridegroom cometh; that they will enter in at the straight gate of eternal life, though they pursue the broad road of destruction; and that they will reign with Christ in glory, though they shall not have followed him in his humiliation. For such unauthorised hopes are very commonly entertained; *every one* hopes to be saved, not merely the humble, and sincere, and zealous Christian, who can "give a good reason of the hope that is in him," but even the most indifferent, and worldly, and profligate, who have no love for that God, whose mercy they expect to share, no Faith in that Redeemer whose merits alone can save them, no hatred of those sins from the punishment of which they think they shall escape, no taste for that heaven whose happiness they presume to anticipate.

And on what are these unscrptural and

delusive hopes built, but on that foundation of sand, man's false notion of the mercy of God, which wrests the sword of justice from his hands, and leaves him a weak, defenceless Being, exposed to the insult and mockery of his rebellious creatures, unable to enforce his laws, to execute his threats, or to withhold his favours even from those for whom they were never intended? But this is not the God revealed to us in the Scriptures; for He is, as Joshua declared to the Israelites, "an holy God, He is a jealous God, He will not forgive your transgressions, nor your sins;" that is to say, as long as you continue in them. Even when he proclaimed his own name to Moses, as the "Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin," even then, after that encouraging exhibition of himself as a God of Love, he yet added, "and that will by no means clear the guilty." He will have his authority revered, as well as his pardon sought; and will have those love his holiness, who desire to partake of his mercy.

But did not Christ come into the world to save *sinners?* Oh yes, my brethren, that is indeed "a true saying, and worthy of all acceptation;" that truth is man's only hope, and

consolation, and refuge, (as I trust in my next discourse more fully to set before you,) Christ *did* come into the world to save sinners, and sinners only, otherwise all were lost, and the mercy of God, though it would still have existed, as an essential part of the divine nature, would have been an Attribute useless and unknown to man, had not the Redeemer given room for its display, by first satisfying the demands of offended justice. But *what* sinners did He come to save? Sinners who *repent* of their sins; sinners who believe the Gospel; sinners who love God, and keep his commandments; sinners who are anxious about their own salvation; sinners who "crucify the world," "mortify the flesh," "resist the devil," "walk in the Spirit;" sinners who are "*dead* to sin, and alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Read the Gospel through, and you will find no Salvation promised to the impenitent and disobedient; you will find that the Christian, though a sinner, must be holy, pious, and charitable, must imitate the perfections of the Father, for whose mercy he hopes, follow the example of the Son, in whose merits he confides, obey the impulses of the Holy Spirit, "whereby he is sealed unto the day of redemption," and live in the diligent cultivation of those virtues and graces, without

which he cannot be "made meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the Saints in light."

Ask you, why only such sinners can be saved? Because God is infinitely good, and cannot dwell with those who do not love his goodness, neither can they dwell with Him; ("for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?") Because Heaven is a place of purity, and no impure thing can enter there. Because Heaven is the abode of peace, and "there is no peace to the wicked." Because since the rebellion of the evil angels, God and Satan have divided the empire of the world, and to "whomsoever men have yielded themselves servants to obey, his servants they must be, to whom they have obeyed," and such wages they must receive as their respective masters have to bestow, from the one, "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish," from the other, "glory, and honour, and immortality." This is why no sinner can be saved, but those who repent and are converted. It is as impossible for the impenitent and rebellious to be admitted into Heaven, the abode of piety and love, as it is for God to be evil, or for Satan to be good; there *must* be a separation at the day of judgment, between the two great kingdoms which are now mingled

together, and after that time, it will be impossible for the members of either to pass the gulph which will divide them from the other. By the mercy of God, you have now the opportunity of being "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son, in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." May He, by the prevailing influence of His Holy Spirit, dispose us all to embrace without delay, the blessed opportunity so graciously vouchsafed, and collect us all, wandering sheep as we are, into one fold, under a Shepherd, in whose person, and under whose guidance, we need fear no evil. May He "open our eyes, and turn us from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God," that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified through faith that is in Jesus Christ," our only Saviour and Redeemer. *Amen.*

# SERMON XI.

## PARDON PROMISED TO FORSAKEN SIN.

ISAIAH, lv. 7.

***Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.***

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It was my design in the two foregoing discourses, to undermine that false confidence in the Mercy of God, which an ignorance of the true nature of that divine Attribute, coupled with a love of sin, so commonly engenders in the minds of careless and inconsiderate men. I endeavoured to convince you, that there is no warrant in Scripture for that presumptuous hope of Pardon and Salvation, with which the impenitent, and unbelieving, and disobedient, too

readily delude their consciences, and quiet their fears; that the Mercy of God does not imply an indiscriminate forgiveness of all sin, as well that which is loved and cherished, as that which is repented of and forsaken; but that it is promised only to the humble, and penitent, and devout Christian, who in his heart deeply feels, and in his life anxiously strives to exhibit, his sincere hatred of the sins which render pardon necessary, and his pious gratitude to the bountiful hand, by which it is bestowed.

But it is possible, that my arguments may have had the effect of exciting in some minds, fears as unreasonable, as the very presumption which they were designed to check. It is possible, that by speaking of the justice of God, and of the necessity of holiness, I may have awakened such apprehensions in the breasts, either of conscious sinners, or of timid and scrupulous persons, as may dispose them to despair of Salvation, and to cry out in an agony of alarm, "who then can be saved?" If God be so severe upon sin, if the Scriptures require such firm faith, such heart-felt repentance, such devout piety, such active charity, such purity of soul, so strict an obedience to "all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord," if Heaven is thus rendered so difficult of access, that "scarcely

the righteous can be saved," oh! " where shall we appear, ungodly and sinners " as we are?

Let me remind you of an observation which I have before made, that the Scriptures are addressed both to the hopes, and to the fears of men, and that it is the duty of every faithful steward of God's mysteries, in his exhibition of the whole truth, to keep in open view, this twofold character of Revelation. This is absolutely necessary, on account of the different description of persons, of whom, it is probable, every congregation is composed; some are too secure and confident, others too fearful and desponding; some require to be alarmed by a representation of their sin and danger, others to be comforted by a declaration of God's mercy, and an assurance of their own capability of forgiveness. I thought it advisable to consider first, the case of the former, because presumption is the more prevalent error of the two. Many are fearless of the consequences of their sins, and build, without good foundation, on the Mercy of God; few comparatively are oppressed in conscience, and unnecessarily terrified at the contemplation of his justice and wrath. The minister of the gospel therefore is called upon to exercise great prudence and discretion, in distinguishing between these cases, lest he should, on the one

hand, administer false comfort, or, on the other, create needless anxiety. As there will generally be amongst his hearers, persons of both descriptions, and as there is danger lest either class should apply to themselves the arguments addressed to the other, it were prudent never wholly to separate the two subjects; that is, he should never speak of judgment without mercy, nor of mercy without judgment; he should never so represent the Goodness of God, and his readiness to forgive, as to lead the impenitent to presume; nor so describe his hatred of sin, and his anger against careless offenders, as to drive the penitent into despair; every display of the necessity of holiness, should be employed with a declaration of the acceptableness of repentance; it is an equal fault to treat solely of the threatenings of God, or solely of his promises; for he neglects one half of his commission in either case, and does as much injury, if he foster indifference and security, as if he create despondence, and distrust of pardon. Although therefore, the chief end I had in view, in the preceding discourses, was to remove these fallacious hopes of God's Mercy, by which too many encourage themselves, in the midst of a thoughtless and irreligious course of life, yet I was unwilling to conclude them, without adding a word of consolation to

those who sincerely repent, and truly turn to Him. On the present occasion however, I shall enter on a more full exposition of the comfortable truth contained in the text;—"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

This is a pleasing subject on which to enter; and I take advantage of the opportunity on the supposition that there may be some among you who need and are fit to be addressed with such consoling language; who are so humbled by a sense of their own unworthiness and sin, so assured of God's perfect Holiness and Justice, so aware that if dealt with according to their actual merits, Heaven could never be their portion, as to require the comfort with which the Gospel abounds, smarting so much from the painfulness of their wounds, as to be prepared for the healing remedies which the great Physician of souls has, in such cases, mercifully commanded to be applied.

To such I now address myself, as having it in charge to "bind up the broken-hearted, to comfort all that mourn, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;" and may He, who came to publish "glad tidings of great

joy, which should be to all nations," who said "come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," who promised, "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out," and who laid down his own life that all who should repent and believe in him might have forgiveness of their sins, and enjoy hereafter the unspeakable and eternal happiness of His glorious kingdom. May He bring home to your fearful hearts the consolation which, through his word, is administered, and "fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost."

My Brethren, I shall commence with the most unhappy case that can occur. I shall suppose you terrified, and tormented, and troubled in mind at the enormity of your offences, and the intolerable burthen of your sins. I shall suppose that you have so deeply apprehended God's heavy wrath and displeasure, that you almost account yourselves reprobates, forsaken of God, already judged and condemned, past all hope of grace, incapable of mercy, slaves of sin, and your offences so great that they *cannot* be forgiven; and I say decisively, that your fears are unfounded and unnecessary; "for if you repent, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as wool; though they be red like crimson, they

shall be white as snow." There is no sin so serious, which is not pardonable in itself, no crime so great, but, by God's mercy, it may be forgiven; "where sin aboundeth, grace aboundeth much more." The promises are made to *all believers*, and extend to the remission of *all sins*, when the guilty are sincerely grieved for their offences, and anxiously desire to be reconciled. "I came not (says our blessed Saviour) to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." The great distinguishing feature of the Gospel is, that it is a dispensation of mercy; "the law came by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ." Men were in a state of *condemnation* before; there needed not any further revelation from heaven, to declare God's anger against sin; for that was certain, and if there was no way to escape, they might have been left to perish, without any additional intimation of their hopeless state.

But it was to *point out* a way to escape, that a new Revelation was made; it was to release men from their original condemnation, that Christ came upon the earth;—"Thou shalt call his name," said the angel to Joseph, (not Apollyon, or the Destroyer, but) "Jesus," the Saviour, "for he shall save his people from their

sins." Did John the Baptist say to the multitudes, to whom he pointed out the holy personage, whose ways he came to prepare, "Behold the messenger of God's wrath, come to proclaim vengeance against the rebellious inhabitants of the earth?" Did he not say, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world?" In the same way, Christ spake of himself, "God sent not his Son into the world, to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved;" and "the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Surely then, when you consider that this was the very purpose and intent of our Lord's appearance upon earth, you must believe that God, however indignant against wilful and cherished sin, is yet full of mercy, and ready to forgive, with the freest pardon, all who humble themselves before Him, with sorrowful and repentant hearts; surely such a view of the truth will raise your drooping spirits, and encourage you to shake off your distressing fears, and dispose you, instead of shrinking in terror from the presence of God, as a severe Judge, and an angry Avenger, rather to burst forth with David, in the voice of thanksgiving and gratitude, "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thy sin, and healeth all

thine infirmities." "The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, long-suffering, and of great goodness. He will not alway be chiding, neither keepeth he his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our wickednesses. For look how high the heaven is, in comparison of the earth, so great is his mercy also towards them that fear Him. Look how wide also the east is from the west, so far hath he set our sins from us; yea, like as a father pitieth his own children, even so is the Lord merciful towards them that fear Him."

But some dejected and disheartened penitent, overcome by the sense of his unworthiness, replies,—"Yes, this may be true of others, but *I* am excluded; my sins are too many, and too great, for even such mercy to reach my case." How can that be? Is it said in the Gospel, that there is any kind or degree of sin, which cannot, upon repentance, be forgiven? Is there any unpardonable sin in the present day, but final impenitence, which is on this very account so fatal, because it is an obstinate rejection of divine mercy? Are the merits of our blessed Saviour imperfect and finite, so as only to be sufficient for some men, and some sins? Or are they perfect and infinite, equivalent to all the

sins of the world? Do you not see how your doubts render the word of God of none effect, which has said, that He "willeth not that *any* should perish, but that all should come to repentance?" Where will you draw the line on the scale of God's mercy, so as to be able to say, "so far his grace can reach, and no farther; all on this side may be forgiven, one step beyond, and the bounds of pardon are passed?" No, my brethren, there is no such line to be drawn; your sins, however many, may be numbered, however great, may be compassed; God's mercies are countless, and unbounded; as a drop of water is to the sea, so are your transgressions to his mercy; nay, there is no such proportion to be given, for the sea, vast as it is, may yet be measured, but God's mercy cannot be circumscribed or limited.

Whatsoever then your sins may have been, in magnitude or in multitude, fear them not, if you repent; I say not this to make you secure or negligent; I am addressing the contrite, and humble, and broken-hearted, and I say it to cheer them, and to revive their spirits. It is impenitence alone that can render forgiveness impossible; "if" (said our Saviour) "thy brother trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying,

I repent, thou shalt forgive him;" that is, thou shalt forgive him however often he offends, if he is sorry for it, and implores thy pardon, even until seventy times seven, or *always*, without regard to the number or description of his offences.

Is Christ less forgiving himself, who enjoined this forgiveness upon his disciples? Did he not, by this very command, instruct us to imitate the mercy of God, who forgives us our sins in the proportion of ten thousand talents, compared with the hundred pence, that one man forgives another? Your sins are incapable of pardon, do you say? Compare then the debt with the payment which has been made on your behalf; compare Adam and Christ, sin with the remedy for it; the disease with the medicine provided; compare the sick man with the physician, who is ready to undertake his cure, and you will soon perceive that his ability cannot be inadequate to that which He undertakes. God is better able to help, than sin to ruin us; Christ is better able to help, than the devil to destroy. Doubt not of this; "only believe," trust in him, rely on his goodness and his express promise, and be heartily sorry for all your sins. Repentance, through faith in the Redeemer's sacrifice, is the infallible remedy for them all; man cannot now be *innocent*, he was shapen in wickedness, and conceived

in sin; he has lived in actual transgression, offending partly with deliberation, partly by carelessness, partly through ignorance. Both by nature and by practice then we have forfeited for ever our *claims* upon God's favour, and must all kneel before Him in the posture of supplication, and call upon Him in the language of repentance; we must all say, "we are sinners, and deserve thy wrath, but we repent, and pray for mercy." Who can approach him in any other way? and who that *does* so approach Him, will be rejected? The Gospel excludes none; the Gospel measures not sins by magnitude or number, but prescribes repentance for them all, and, upon repentance, promises pardon for them all. Man only excludes himself by impenitence.

But this perhaps is the very thought that troubles you. How do you know that you are not impenitent? How do you know that your repentance is sincere, or if sincere, so deeply felt as God requires? I should say, my brethren, that there can be no doubt *he* truly repents, who anxiously puts these questions to his own conscience; they would not occur to an impenitent man; they would "be foolishness to him," and with regard to the degree of feeling that God demands, although it is impossible that any religious feeling can be at all worthy of the sub-

ject on which it is exercised, yet if our sorrow for sin (infinitely short as it falls of that extreme distress of mind, which its vileness, and ingratitude, and dangerous tendency would deserve,) if our sorrow for sin be such as to produce the proper *consequences* and *fruits* of repentance, then we may reasonably comfort ourselves with the assurance, that the Father who beholds the returning prodigal while he is yet afar off, and the Saviour who will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, and the Holy Spirit, who helpeth our infirmities, will accept in mercy the feeble emotions of our hearts, particularly when we ourselves are afflicted at their coldness; be assured that the Repentance which has the effect of destroying all self-confidence, and self-justification, which leads you to trust in the Redeemer alone for safety, and impels you to forsake the sins which you regret, be assured that such repentance as this has all the essential features which God requires. I grant you that there *is* a sorrow for sin, which is not Repentance; a sorrow and disquietude of mind, which torments many a sinner, who yet is not thereby turned away from his evil course. This is only the voice of an upbraiding and condemning conscience, heard indeed with pain, but disregarded; this sorrow aggravates sin, and renders it more cri-

minal; but the sorrow which leadeth to Repentance, to Humility in the sight of God, to an earnest desire of his Mercy, and to a sincere conversion of heart and life, this is of a godly sort, and he who experiences it, will obtain the pardon which he seeks.

Do not needlessly harass a scrupulous conscience, by enquiring into the degree and intensity of your feeling, until at length you begin to despair of the mercy of God, because you think you have not a sufficiently strong perception of your great need of it. It is true, you have not; it is certain, you never *can* have. It is unquestionable, that you never can estimate the offensiveness of sin, the danger from which you are redeemed, the love which was shown in the mysterious work of salvation, or the happiness which is promised to the contrite Christian; but God will not cast you out for that; he will not require an angel's faculties in one of woman born; "he knoweth whereof you are made, he remembereth that you are but dust;" and though your repentance be but a very imperfect feeling, compared with the heinousness of sin, and the goodness of God, whom you have offended, yet if "it has its fruit unto holiness, its end will be everlasting life."

I hope you do not forget, that I have been

all along speaking for the encouragement of the afflicted and distressed sinner; my words do not apply to those who feel no such affliction or distress. Repentance must go before remission of sins, as remission of sins must be prior to the enjoyment of heaven. If all are sinners, all must repent before they can be saved. But does this lessen the Mercy of God, or deprive it of its freeness, and make it a dear bought purchase? What! is it not a sufficient mercy that God will admit man on any terms to his favour? Is it not a stupenduous and incomprehensible mercy, that He himself found out such a wonderful method of reconciliation? And is not the gift altogether free, when man has only to accept that which is given, and to be grateful for it? For the sincere Christian's obedience is not an irksome task, or a constrained duty; it is not a laborious effort to acquire a difficult prize; it is the consequence, not the cause of his forgiveness; he *believes* in the Mercy of God, as secured and revealed by his Saviour, and then holiness springs up from the love and gratitude, which that faith cannot fail to produce. It is you, who do dishonour to the Mercy of God, and detract from his greatness, who thoughtlessly regard it as a mere weak disposition to overlook all offences; you know nothing of its real

magnitude, as revealed in Scripture; nor will you know, until you look upon God as a Being of infinite Holiness and Justice, and with the eye of faith contemplate the sacrifice which that mercy inclined him to make. At present you scarcely think sin hateful to Him, at all events not so hateful but that the mere wish of the sinner can obtain its pardon; but surely when you shall have heard from the Gospel that it was so odious as to be incapable of atonement but through the sufferings and death of a divine Redeemer, and that Redeemer, His mysterious Son, co-equal and co-eternal with Himself, you will perceive Him to be an infinitely more merciful God than you before imagined Him. The God whom Christians adore, is indeed a God of mercy, a God who, though perfectly good, and by the necessity of His nature requiring perfect obedience of his creatures, could yet invent a way by which repentance might be made a substitute for innocence, and sincere endeavours to please Him, with all their failures and imperfections, might stand in the place of that absolute compliance with his will which strict justice demanded.

How is the mercy of God exalted in the eyes of him who believes this important and invaluable truth? He says "now know I that the

Lord is gracious, because, though man had forfeited his favour and deserved his wrath, he yet stretched forth his hand to save him, and voluntarily opened again the door of heaven, which sin had closed." And what is the consequence of this knowledge? Not to render him secure and confident in the midst of his sins, but to make him love God, who first loved him, and hate that sin, which, but for the love of God, would have proved his ruin. How can he wilfully offend a Father who has shown him such unspeakable kindness? The Christian doctrine of the mercy of God has a directly opposite effect to that, which the false views of worldly and careless men produce; it is so far from affording any encouragement to sin, or apology for it, that it most clearly condemns it, and provides the greatest security against it, in the affection of him who believes himself to be redeemed. His great fear is lest he should not hate it with sufficient aversion, or avoid it with sufficient care; he esteems it a contradiction to hope for salvation, and to love the very thing which made a Saviour necessary; he knows that sin is deadly still, if not subdued in his own heart, and that he must be released from bondage, before he can be delivered from its punishment. No man is so holy as the Christian, for no man has such power-

ful *motives* to holiness as he has, in the knowledge of God's perfection, and in the gratitude which he owes for his undeserved deliverance.

Imperfect he must still be, and he grieves that he can make but so small an approach to the standard at which he desires to arrive; but he is comforted by the assurance that although, through the frailty and infirmity of his nature, he must ever remain a sinner, yet, inasmuch as Christ came to save sinners only, in this character he may confidently hope for pardon, while in none he could demand a reward.

May we all be disposed so to embrace the mercy of God, and so to express our thankfulness for it, that after a life of faith, and piety, and holiness on earth, we may be united to the company of sinners saved in heaven, and praise to all eternity the wondrous love by which we were redeemed. *Amen.*

# SERMON XII.

## CONFESSION OF SIN.

1 JOHN i. 8, 9.

***If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us, but if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.***

As I have taken, for my text, one of the sentences appointed to be read at the commencement of our church service, so I will begin my discourse to you, with the first words of the pious exhortation which immediately follows. "Dearly beloved brethren, the Scripture moveth us in sundry places, to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness; and that we should not dissemble nor cloke them before the face of Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, but

confess them with an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart; to the end that we may obtain forgiveness of the same, by his infinite goodness and mercy."

It was not without due consideration, that this declaration was placed in the introduction to that admirable form of public worship, which we use every sabbath-day; for it was well understood by those pious Christians, to whom we are indebted for it, that sinful man ought never to present himself before God in prayer, without first acknowledging his wickedness, and imploring pardon. The confession of our sins is one of the very first of duties; for if we do not know ourselves to be sinners, we do not know that we have need of a Redeemer; and if we do not know that we have need of a Redeemer, we are ignorant of the most fundamental fact in the Religion which we profess; had men not been sinners, there would have been no such Revelation as the Gospel; and to those, who do not know themselves to be sinners, that Revelation has been made in vain.

It is not therefore without reason, as I have said, that we begin our devotions with a confession of our unworthiness and sin; not of course for the purpose of informing God of that with which he is very well acquainted, but for the

sake of constantly keeping alive in our own minds, that conviction of our sinfulness, without which there is no repentance, therefore no amendment of life, therefore no pardon, therefore no Salvation. So that, although so much stress is laid upon confession, yet you cannot suppose that the mere confession is worth any thing; it is only valuable for the sake of the Repentance, which ought to follow. Confession is an easy duty enough. I doubt if there be a man in the world, who would seriously deny that he is a sinner; nay, strangely enough, worldly and irreligious men often make the very acknowledgment of their sins, a kind of apology for them. You will hear many a man, when charged with an irregular life, confess that he is "no saint," (as the expression is,) or that he is a "sad example of the infirmity of the flesh," and at the same time, you may observe in him an air of secret satisfaction, as if he thought he had done something meritorious in making the confession, and as if he thought he might with less scruple continue in his vices, after having acknowledged how wicked he was. But this is "deceiving himself" as manifestly and as fatally, as if he were to say he "had no sin;" he might as well deny his sinfulness, as acknowledge it without repentance.

The end and object therefore of the confession of our sins is, that we may sincerely repent of them. This is indispensable; it is absolutely necessary to Salvation; there is no way, no hope, of going to Heaven without it. Read the Bible from beginning to end, and you will find no promise of pardon to the impenitent; the whole burthen and tenour of it is, "repent and be converted." You must have sufficient acquaintance with the Scriptures to know that I do not speak too strongly on this subject; for has not God in these Scriptures, "commanded all men every where to repent?" Was not repentance preached by all the prophets under the Old Covenant? Was it not preached by John the Baptist? Was it not preached by our Saviour himself? "Except ye repent," said that merciful Redeemer, who came into the world on purpose to save sinners, "Except ye repent, ye shall all perish." The very first words with which he began his preaching were, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand?" and almost the last words that he uttered, before he was received up into Heaven, were, that "it behoved that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, among all nations." Observe too how faithfully his apostles fulfilled his instructions in this

respect; for on the very first day of their public ministry, that day on which the Holy Ghost was first poured out upon them, in an assembly of men from "every nation under Heaven," Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Lybia, about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and Proselytes, Cretes and Arabians,"—in this mingled multitude St. Peter preached, in language, which by an express miracle for the purpose, was made intelligible to men of so many different tongues, "Repent and be baptized EVERY *one of you*, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins." You remark doubtless, that in the apostle's preaching, as in his master's, the same order is observed; repentance comes first, then remission of sins; no forgiveness is proclaimed to the impenitent.

Do you not therefore from all this perceive, that it is vain, nay presumptuous, to hope for Heaven and eternal life without repentance? You surely are not ignorant of these things; you hardly ever heard or read one sermon, or one chapter in the Gospel, in which the doctrine was not either directly taught, or at least implied. You must know, that obstinate and impenitent

sinners, have the wrath of God hanging over them, and the prospect of eternal misery lying before them; you must know that while men live in sin, they cannot possibly expect the divine favour; you cannot but think that that Holy Being, who is "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity" without offence, and "in whose sight the very heavens, (beautiful and glorious as they are) are not clean," is in his nature as hostile to sin, as light is inconsistent with darkness. You must be acquainted with the dreadful threatenings against sin, which the Gospel every where contains. You must have heard and known long ago, that Christ came into the world to save those only who would turn from their evil ways, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance.

All this, I am sure, must form a part of your creed, for nothing is more plainly revealed. Will you *not* repent then, though Heaven depends upon it? Will any of you by living in wilful sin, refuse the Mercy of God, and turn aside the hand that offers you salvation? If there is any man now present, who is persuaded that the Gospel is not true, I ask him why does he come here? Why does he not renounce his Baptism, throw off the name of a Christian, and give up the profession of religion altogether? Why is he ever seen on his knees? Why does

he ever sit with patience to hear what *we* call the word of God, read or preached? Why does he not go forth, and declare among his neighbours and acquaintance, that the Gospel is only a "cunningly-devised fable," that there is no truth in it, and that they who talk of God and Judgment, of Heaven and Hell, are but impostors, and "deceivers of the people?" If any man does not believe the Gospel, why, I ask again, does he pretend to believe it? Why does he not honestly declare himself to be an infidel?

Although I have put these questions, I do not really suppose that there is such a character among you, as an absolute infidel; yet I am not equally confident that there may not be more than one, who are living, if possible, in greater sin and greater danger; I mean impenitent believers. You are all believers, I allow, but are none of you living in sin? Are none of you "holding the truth in unrighteousness?" Are none of you addicted to uncleanness and debauchery? Are none of you drunkards? Are none of you profane swearers? Are none of you given to evil speaking, lying, and slandering? Are none of you covetous and worldly-minded? Are none of you lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God? Are none of you utterly careless, and forgetful of all your religious duties?

Search your own hearts and consciences; be not ashamed to confess the truth to *yourselves*; for there is no witness to your confession but God; and He knows the truth, whether you own it or not. Hear me then with seriousness, all ye who believe the Gospel, but are conscious to yourselves that you do not obey it.

You believe that there is a God in Heaven, whose eye is always upon you, and whom you are insulting to his face, and defying, by every sin that you commit, nay, by every evil thought which you indulge. Consider then who it is that you venture to disobey; it is the great Creator and Sovereign of the whole universe; it is He who gives laws to all the world, by whose command the sun and moon give their light, and all the stars are guided in their courses; it is that God who, whatever he wills to be done throughout all nature, has only to speak the word, and immediately it is accomplished. This is the Being, whom that little insignificant creature, man, weak, helpless, dependent, mortal man, is bold enough wilfully to disobey. But "thinkest thou this, O man," that God doth not see thee? or that he doth not regard thee? or that he will pardon thee, even without repentance? Thinkest thou that He doth not utterly hate sin, and that He will not assuredly punish the sinner, except

he repent? Look at the instances of his indignation against sin which he has hitherto given. Did he not cast the very angels out of heaven when they resisted him? Did he not drive Adam and Eve out of paradise, and inflict a deadly curse upon their whole posterity for one transgression? Did he not once drown all the world except one family, for their wickedness? Did He not overthrow the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, destroying them with fire and brimstone out of heaven, because "their sin was very grievous?" Did he not send his own Son into the world to be a sacrifice for sin, because it was so odious to Him, that no other expiation could appease him? And though he does not usually punish sin in this world, has he not revealed to us that there will be a day of retribution hereafter? that "the hour is coming, in which those that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation?" Oh! dread then above all things to continue at enmity with so great and so holy a God; but confess your sins unto Him with humble and contrite spirits, beseeching him "to give you true repentance, to forgive you all your sins, negligences, and ignorances, and to endue you

with the grace of his Holy Spirit, to amend your lives according to his holy word."

I can fancy some man, overwhelmed with the consciousness of his manifold and grievous offences, and reflecting upon the greatness of the Being whom he has insulted, the warnings he has despised, the opportunities that he has neglected, I can fancy such a man, pricked to the heart at the thought, and ready to fall into despair, as if he had now sinned beyond all hope of forgiveness But entertain not so dismal a thought : the Gospel, severe as it is upon the impenitent, is full of encouragement to those who are convinced of their sins, and desirous to forsake them. Why should the *greatest* sinner despair ? There is no attribute of God more dwelt upon in the Scriptures, than his Mercy. Does he not say, that He "sheweth mercy unto thousands, in them that love Him, and keep his commandments ?" Did he not proclaim His name to Moses in the mount, as "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin ?" Does not David say of Him, "like as a Father pitieth his own children, even so is the Lord, merciful, towards them that fear Him ;" and that his mercy is as

vast as the space between Heaven and Earth? Does not the Prophet Joel say, that "He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness?" Does not the Prophet Daniel say, "To the Lord our God, belong mercies and forgivenessess, though we have rebelled against Him?" And is not the same doctrine taught in the New Testament? Nay, is not the very Revelation which it contains, an undoubted proof of it? Is not the method of Salvation, therein revealed, such a monument of God's love towards us, as no tongue can express, and no heart conceive? And does not the Gospel abound in the most consoling assurances of pardon and acceptance to the very worst of sinners, if they will but repent? Did not our Saviour say, that He came expressly to "seek and to save that which was lost?" That He came to "call sinners to repentance?" Did He not associate with persons of notoriously bad lives, for the purpose of reclaiming them? Did He not forgive the sins of the woman who was brought to him for judgment? Did He not pray even for those who crucified Him? Did He not take the penitent thief with Him into paradise?" Did He not declare, that "there is joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repent-

ance?" Did He not, in the parable of the Prodigal Son, represent God as willing to receive the most profligate and rebellious, as soon as they return to Him? Did He not signify, by the parable of the Pharisee and Publican, that however vile a man may have been, yet when once he has come to a conviction of his sins, and prays for mercy, he is regarded with favour! And does He not declare to us, in the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard, that though this repentance may have been long delayed, yet if it is sincere at last, it will be accepted? Nay, to sum up the whole doctrine in one short sentence, did He not say in the plainest language, "him that cometh to me, I will *in no-wise* cast out?"

You see then, that although the doctrines of our religion are most fearful to those who continue in sin, there is every encouragement offered to repentance. There is no ground for despair or distrust of God's mercy, if men once perceive their need of it, and endeavour to obtain it by sincere and heartfelt contrition. The Gospel is not a mere book of terrors; but it is a book of consolation to those who are "weary and heavy-laden" with a sense of their sinfulness. The very name signifies "good news;" it is a beautiful name, and one most truly applicable to

the joyful doctrines which it contains; it is the best news that ever was published to the world; it is "Glad Tidings of great joy" to every individual who hears and rightly receives it; it is the proclamation of peace to those who were at enmity with God, of pardon to the condemned, of comfort to the broken hearted, of happiness to the miserable; in a word, it assures every self-convicted sinner, every one, who, like the humble publican, is so weighed down with the consciousness of his guilt, that he scarcely dares to lift so much as his eyes towards heaven; it assures every such person, that "he has an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and that He is the propitiation for his sins."

My discourse then has had this double aim; to make those fear and tremble, who do not repent; and to inspire those with confidence, and a good courage, who do. The Gospel reveals to the impenitent sinner, that he is on the brink of a dreadful precipice, and ready to fall into destruction; to the penitent, that there is a hand stretched out to pull him back, and rescue him from his danger, if he will but lay hold of it. It shows God to the one as an Enemy and Avenger; to the other, as a Friend and merciful Father; it exhibits Him as all anger against those who

disobey Him; and as all love towards those who put themselves under his guidance, and seek for his favour.

But let me warn you once more, not to imagine that the mere confession of sins is true repentance. Many know and confess themselves to be sinners, who are yet far from sincerely repenting. Repentance is, first, genuine sorrow for sin, and then the fruit of that sorrow, amendment of life. The man who does not forsake his sins, utterly deceives himself, if he supposes that the very first seed of repentance is sown in his heart. When we begin to struggle with our sinful inclinations, when we heartily pray to God to help us in overcoming them, and when, on our own part, we anxiously try to avoid the occasions of, and temptations to sin, then, and then only, is our sorrow "of that godly sort, which leadeth to repentance." To confess our sinfulness, and to remain as great sinners as ever, is only to acknowledge that we shall be deservedly punished; it is not advancing one step towards a pardon, or towards a reasonable hope of Heaven.

Let our repentance then be, not in word, but in deed; let it be made known to God, not merely by the confession of our lips, but by the humble acknowledgement and contrition of our

hearts; and let it be made known to the world, by the purity and holiness of our lives. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

# SERMON XIII.

## JUDGE NOT.

ROMANS xiv. 10.

***But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the Judgment seat of Christ.***

In this and in the following chapter, the Apostle reproves the uncharitable and unchristian habit which appears to have prevailed amongst those to whom he wrote, of judging and condemning one another for differences of opinion, on certain questions of religion. He explains to them in what way each party ought to behave towards the other, and he admonishes them that all angry feelings, excited by such discussions, ought to be allayed by a consideration of every man's responsibility to God alone, for the opinions

he might entertain. There were at Rome, as in perhaps all the churches in those days, both Jewish and Gentile converts to Christianity, and the particular questions in debate among them, were concerning the necessity of observing the Mosaic ordinances, in regard to clean and unclean meats, and holy and profane days. "Some of the Jewish converts, fancying that the meats forbidden by Moses were unclean in themselves, and that the days which he commanded to be kept holy were still to be sanctified, looked on their Gentile brethren as profane persons, because they partook of all kinds of meats without any distinction, and regarded every day alike. On the other hand, the Gentiles despised the Jews as ignorant bigots, for making any distinction in matters that appeared so indifferent to *them*, and refused to admit them into their company." Both parties the Apostle condemns, and instructs them that they are to live in charitable communion and intercourse one with another, expressing neither censure nor contempt of the persons who differed from them, but each duly respecting the other's conscientious scruples. He reminds them that they are none of them accountable to their neighbours for their opinions, that to their own masters they would stand or fall, and that all would one day appear before the judgment

seat of Christ, to answer for themselves. And in consideration of this last most solemn truth, he warns them that every man ought to be fully persuaded in his own mind of the propriety of his own practice, inasmuch as it was sinful to permit himself in any thing, of the lawfulness of which he doubted. He concludes the subject with this prayer and exhortation; "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded, that is, to have the same charitable disposition one towards another, according to Christ Jesus; that ye may with one mind and one mouth, glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God."

Now, although the particular questions which caused those dissensions in the Roman church, no longer exist, yet the principles which the Apostle lays down are of universal application, whatever be the controversy that divides the Christian world, and it shall be my endeavour to show you how they may be made useful in the present day.

My brethren, you cannot be ignorant that a variety of different opinions prevail among Christians on the subject of their religion; you can scarcely go into any society, in which, should

you venture to express your sentiments on some doctrine, you would not immediately find yourselves suspected of error, and accordingly challenged to dispute. You would have to defend yourselves against objections to that which you had supposed to be unquestionably true; your faith would be attacked in points which you had previously thought to be unassailable; you would be sneered at for your ignorance by some, by others condemned for your heresies. Religion, alas! is degenerated into a mere theme for controversy; the simplicity and unity of the Christian faith are things which we may talk of and admire in fancy, but which, if we seek for the reality, we shall not find in existence. Christ's seamless vesture is rent and torn into a thousand shreds, and those shreds so shaped, and coloured, and ornamented, according to the capricious tastes of their various possessors, that even should there be an universal desire to collect them, and put them together again, they would make but a motley garment of discordant patch-work, most unlike indeed to that which, when whole and undivided, seemed to be a perfect model of the manufacturer's skill. Were I but to repeat to you the long catalogue of all the names by which Christians are called, as distinguishing them from their brethren of the same fundamental faith, you

would be wearied with the tedious detail. Oh! it is wearisome indeed to one, who is much conversant with religious studies, or who mixes much with the various members of opposing sects, to find that he is ever involved in a confused chaos of argument and disputation, and that he is so tossed and bandied about between the extremes of contradictory doctrines. For unhappily, men who differ *will* put the subject of difference foremost on all occasions; they refuse to meet on ground where they can agree, but must always be contending about the little spot of land which has caused their variance. Every man appears to think that doctrine of most importance, the truth of which is called in question by his neighbour; and I fear he sometimes thinks *worse* of his neighbour for that one error, which he supposes him to hold, than if he had sacrificed the very substance of religion by a profane and unholy life. Were you to read the numberless volumes of religious controversy, and the blood-stained histories of religious persecutions, and religious wars, which have disgraced the world, you would acknowledge the truth of my description, though you would wonder indeed how Christianity should have fostered such a spirit, or have produced such effects. And what apology shall be offered for these divisions? Shall we

contend for the certainty of the important and essential doctrines of the Gospel, by saying that all these disputes have been only about minor and insignificant subjects? Then, so much the greater shame that *trifles* have been able to create such hostility and disunion among men, who are brethren, as the children of one common Father, and still more called to brotherly love, by the commands of their religion. Or shall we excuse their animosities by saying that they are fundamental articles of faith which have set them at variance? Then where is the assurance of our not being victims of errors that are dangerous to the salvation of our souls? Still I trust, and indeed I firmly believe, reproachful as the acknowledgement is to thousands of the professors of Christianity, that the former account is the real truth; I mean, that the most frequent and ordinary cause of the angry disputes of men, on the subject of Christianity, are secondary and unimportant doctrines, the belief or disbelief of which is not attended with hazard to the soul. Such was certainly the fact with regard to those questions which we read of in the chapter before us. They were most insignificant questions, and yet you observe what an evil and unchristian spirit they produced. Christians could so belie their name as to separate themselves from each other's

society, merely because they differed about the lawfulness of using certain kinds of food, and the necessity of keeping holy certain days.

But, be the particulars about which we differ, important or unimportant, the law of Charity remains the same, and a due regard to it should prevent that hatred and ill will, which too often attach an unhappy consequence to discussions about matters, otherwise of trifling moment, and which stamp the character of sin upon disagreements, otherwise innocent. For he is no Christian, who has not charity; "though I understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." I might as well be an ignorant heathen, or an obstinate unbeliever; and I *have* no charity, if I harshly judge and condemn a brother, who may happen not to be of the same opinion with myself. What have I to do with his opinions? "to his own master he standeth or falleth;" and to *my* own master, *I* stand or fall. Religion is a matter of personal interest to every individual. I have not to answer for another man's faith, nor he for mine. We are all of us accountable to God alone. I say not that I would banish temperate discussion on disputed points of Scripture; for by such a method,

error is often cleared away, and truth discovered; but violent quarrels, and jarring contentions, converting what should be a peaceful society, into a confused Babel, are utterly subversive of Christian concord, and so not less hateful to God, than ruinous to man. Shew me the most orthodox champion of the Faith, who flings about censures and anathemas upon all who gainsay him, and I will set against that man a very Heretic, who charitably forbears to pass judgment on those whom he considers to be erroneous, as a much more sincere disciple of the Gospel of peace, and a much more hopeful candidate for the harmonious kingdom of God in heaven.

My brethren, Christ who is ascended into the heavens will come again in glory, and sit upon the seat of judgment; and "before Him shall be assembled all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left." But by what rule will that separation be made? Will that grand distinction be determined by differences of Church or Sect? Will men then come boldly forward, and plead with confidence, as their title to a place on the right hand, "we and our party were of such and such a

denomination, *we* only have held and contended for the truth, all the rest were in error, and deserve now to be rejected for their false doctrines?" Nay, the question will then be, who were truly Christians, and who were not so? All other names will be dropped; the loud and dissonant clamour, "I was of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas," will be raised no more, or raised in vain; while the weak voice of some humble penitent, quietly avowing his faith in his only Lord and master, whose doctrines were his only religion, and whose merits the sole foundation of his hope, disclaiming every other appellation, than "I was of Christ," will be heard with favour, and he who utters it, will be selected from among the crowd of dissappointed applicants.

And from what party will that voice proceed? No matter; it is the voice of a Christian; the name of his Church or sect will not be required, for it could add no force to his appeal, no dignity to his much superior title. But surely he will be some man who had been well instructed in the religious learning of his age, and deeply read in the sound writings of the orthodox divines? Nay, perhaps he will be one, who was satisfied with his Bible, and had no time, or taste, or talent, for those profound

researches. Then doubtless he must have been in error, on many important subjects? In error most probably, like other weak mortals, through the imperfection of his understanding, but on no point that affected his salvation; so far at least his humble enquiry after truth was successful. And what did it concern him to know beyond this? The highest and most useful knowledge that man can attain, *he* had attained. What then! are whole libraries of learning thrown away? And can men be saved without having possessed the smallest particle of the treasures of instruction which they contain?

The Bible, is the Christian's best library, and worth all the volumes that cumber our loaded shelves. I speak not of course in disparagement of human learning, when directed to a useful end, and made subservient to religious truth; I only mean to assert, that *Learning* is not absolutely *necesssary* to Salvation, and that the endless controversies, which it has generated, and perpetuated, are often detrimental to it; they lead us away from the fountain of wisdom, and perplex and bewilder us with mists, and clouds of doubt and difficulty, which more often involve in obscurity, than serve to illuminate the simple truths of the Gospel. How many a man, who has lost himself in the mazes of learned divinity,

and false philosophy, wishes he could rid himself of the incumbrance of his unprofitable knowledge, and return with an unshackled, and unbiassed mind, to seek pure instruction from the pages of heavenly truth! How many a man would be a better Christian, had he devoted himself less to the study of human composition, and more frequently brushed the gathering dust from his neglected Bible! How many a man will stand at the bar of judgment hereafter, his mind replete with the stores of erudition, provided by the vain "disputations of this world," who will be convicted of the veriest ignorance and most senseless folly, while the illiterate Christian, guiltless of all other knowledge but the Word of God, will be applauded, as a sound proficient in the truest wisdom. "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"

Away then with all reliance upon your superior knowledge of the truth. Away with all the satisfaction you may feel in thinking that you belong to the most orthodox denomination of Christians. Away with all the triumph you may enjoy, at being able to refute with unanswerable

arguments the gainsayers of your particular creed. Away, above all, with any contempt that you may have felt towards those whom you may think in error on subjects of religion, and with any hostility you may have entertained against the supporters of doctrines that are opposed to your own. "Shall we not all stand before the judgment seat of Christ? Shall not every one of us give account of himself to God? Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?" We are all in error on many subjects; but God will forgive the infirmities of our understanding, and incorrectness of our judgment, if we seek the truth with humility and honesty, if we hold the truth that we think we have found with charity, and if we strive (with devout prayer for his assistance) to practise the truth which we think we hold, with zeal and fidelity. Study to live in peace and quietness with all your brethren, however they may differ from you in opinion; go hand in hand with them as far as you can agree; respect their consciences and give them credit for sincerity when you cannot unite with them in the same belief. Christ died for the whole world, not for any particular class; and though of visible assemblies of men, called after his name, there are great varieties, and all distinguished by some shade of difference in doctrine or in prac-

tice, yet his true and invisible church is not here or there, is not confined to one sect, or to be described by one name, but is universal; it embraces the whole Christian community; he has true worshippers of every denomination; and these only will he select at the day of judgment, and transplant into his church triumphant in heaven, to whatever class they may have belonged. Insincere members may be *in* his church, but they are not *of* it; though by profession they "hold the truth," the truth will not save them; errors of the understanding will meet with pardon, while errors of the heart and life, if not corrected, will end in ruin.

You will not, I trust, suspect me of endeavouring, by what I have now said, to recommend an indifference and carelessness of mind, on the subject of religious doctrines; you will not suppose that I mean to hold *him* up as an example, who feels no concern to know whether his creed be true or false; that is far from my purpose, for a religious man cannot *but* be anxious to avoid error, cannot but be very desirous that he may hold the sincere and genuine truths of the Gospel. Such a man will enquire "what is truth?" with a more serious mind, and a deeper curiosity, than Pilate did, and will revere the doctrines which he believes to be taught in the Gospel, as

the revelations of an all-wise God. But he will not angrily dispute and contend about his opinions, he will not refuse "the right hand of fellowship" to a Christian brother whose sentiments may, in some particulars, be dissimilar from his own. He will obey the attractive power of charity, instead of the repelling force of discordant doctrines; and he will prefer the character of a good Christian to the highest honour that the reputation of being a zealous partisan could obtain for him, from a host of contentious disputants. If we would hope for forgiveness from God, we "must from our hearts forgive every man his brother," even the offences and injuries of which he may have been guilty towards us. That he is merely of a different persuasion, how can this be esteemed an offence or injury at all? and even if it be, there is no ground for enmity, for the balance is equal between the two parties. The one is as much an offender as the other. Each sincerely believes himself to be on the side of truth; which really is so, God only knows with certainty, and the day of judgment only will disclose, when we shall no longer see through a glass dimly and darkly, but face to face. Errors, as well as sin, are the unavoidable burthens of imperfect and ignorant man in this world; and error, as well as sin, is atoned for and will be for-

given for Christ's sake, to the sincere enquirer after divine truth, though in some points he be unwillingly deceived, and to the devout follower of our blessed Saviour, however short he may fall through human frailty, of attaining to the excellence of the pattern and rule that are set before him. God be merciful to us erring and sinful mortals, and grant that we may be linked together in the bonds of Christian charity upon earth, as we hope to be thoroughly united in eternal love in heaven, through Jesus Christ the one Lord and Saviour of us all. *Amen.*

# SERMON XIV.

## THE MORTALITY OF MAN.

JOB xiv. 1, 2.

***Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.***

***He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.***

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THESE are words, which many, perhaps all of you, in your turn, have heard read, under circumstances that must have impressed your minds with a lively sense of their truth and propriety; I mean, at the solemn ceremony of the burial of those who have confirmed and verified them by their death. And who among you, when bending over and looking into the grave, just opened to receive the mortal remains of some loved friend, while the minister of religion pronounced

those affecting words, "Man that is born of a woman, hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery; he cometh up and is cut down like a flower, he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay;" who among you, I ask, has then failed to make a secret acknowledgment to himself, that the shortness and vanity of human life are most justly represented by those comparisons? Who among you but has then felt the conviction most forcibly impressed upon his mind, that man is a weak, miserable, insignificant creature; that he is "as a thing of nought," light as the feather which is the sport of every air, empty and unsubstantial as the bubble, which just glitters for a moment on the surface of the water, and then bursts and disappears, leaving no mark where it had been?

You will say that I am entering upon a stale and worn out subject, on one which is the continual theme of sermons, and which has been so frequently handled, that it is become not merely dull and uninteresting, but absolutely offensive. And I allow my brethren, that it *is* old; I grant that the truth in this matter is so very striking and self-evident, that it has not escaped the observation even of those who are the least given to reflection; I am aware, that from the time of the Patriarch Jacob, who declared that his days

had been "few and evil," down to the present hour, language has been exhausted, in endeavouring to represent the frailty and nothingness of human life. And if I were certain that all who are ready to make this acknowledgment, were equally disposed to draw from it, the serious conclusion, and the practical application, to which it ought to lead, I would be silent, and not needlessly waste your time by offering any remarks of mine, on so common a subject. But when I consider the strange inconsistency of man, when I recollect that the very same persons, who know and confess that their "days are but as it were a span long," and that they are liable to be ushered into the world of spirits at any hour, without a moment's notice, are nevertheless so absorbed in the affairs of life, and so lay out their various schemes of pleasure and of profit, as if they were to endure for ever upon earth, I feel certain, that the time is not yet arrived, when it will be unnecessary to upbraid them with their folly, or to implore them to behave in a manner more conformable to their real character as mortals.

Do you refuse to believe this general charge of folly and thoughtlessness, without proof? I refer you then to your own knowledge of yourselves, and to your own experience of the ways

of mankind. Only look around the world, and see what is going on there! See if the greater part of men seem to think that they have any more important business to attend to, than the affairs of this life! See if they do not spend their whole time, and thoughts, and strength, upon things which can only last them till they die, if even so long! See if they are not idly and unprofitably industrious in the pursuit of the vainest of vanities, and the most trivial of trifles! See if Mammon, the God of this world, has not many more servants, than the Lord Jehovah, the God of Heaven, and if his servants are not in general more faithful and devoted! See if the broad road, (the great highway, which is frequented by the lovers of the world, the seekers of earthly pleasure,) is not trodden by multitudes without number, while we may almost *count* those who are carefully pursuing their journey towards their eternal home, in the strait and narrow way! Alas! alas! we are most of us, I fear, nearly in the condition, in which the Jailor of Philippi was before the prison doors were burst open; like him we almost require a miracle to awake us out of our sleep, and to force us upon the solemn enquiry, how we are to be saved? We find so much to do to provide for the comfort and gratification of our bodies,

that we overlook our souls; we are so intent upon the pursuit of temporal interests and engagements, that we forget that we have any concern in things spiritual and eternal; present cares, present scenes, take up all our attention; we suffer ourselves to be carried along the stream of time, while catching at the straws that float upon its surface, without reflecting that we are hurried away towards a boundless ocean, to whose shores we shall never be able to return.

Oh! how shall this folly be corrected? How shall men be persuaded of the bitterness, the utter worthlessness, of every thing that belongs only to this brief life, this shadow of existence, this ephemeral and perishing world? Ye, who have looked upon this earth as your "abiding place," and who have made its "good things" the only objects of your desire and pursuit, go and learn the true value of them in a church-yard, among the bodies of those, whose companions you will shortly be! Go and stand among the graves and tomb-stones, and give loose to your reflections, and I think you will not fail to perceive how unwise you have been. There at every step you will tread upon the remains of those who were once inhabitants of this world like yourselves; who had all once their cares, and pursuits, and interests, in this life, their enjoyments and distresses, their loves

and their aversions, their homes and their friends, doubtless also their follies and their sins, as you yourselves have at this moment; there you will trample on the wealthy, the important, the proud, the great, the strong, the learned, the beautiful, of this world: but what are they now? Nothing but so much earth, and dust, and ashes; all their possessions, all their advantages, all their accomplishments are gone; and they are no more concerned about the world, which was once their home, than if they had never belonged to it.

Now you *know* this is the condition to which we must all, sooner or later, come. Interested as we may now be, in the business and pleasures of life, the time will be, when we shall care no more about them, than they do, who have died before us. The time will be when the rich man will no more pride himself upon his wealth, when those who are full of schemes and projects, will no longer trouble themselves about their execution, when the strong will be reduced to weakness, and the beautiful to deformity, yet will not lament over their altered state; when, in a word, we shall be perfectly indifferent to every earthly thing, that we now are anxious about, and consider of so great consequence. Since then, all those things which occupy worldly minds, must in a very few years, and may in a

few days, or hours, come to nothing, how *can* we be such fools, such idiots, as to set any great value on them? How can we be such madmen as to purchase them with the price of our immortal souls, even one of which is worth more than the whole material universe?

I am persuaded that in your consciences you all admit the truth of these remarks. I am certain that you must admit it, that you cannot oppose the slightest reasonable objection to it; but the mere admission is nothing, for you cannot avoid it; I want to bring you to the fruits, to the practical consequences of your acknowledgment. Life is vain, you allow it; why then do you treat it as if it were of great importance? Why devote your whole time to its trifling pleasures, and interests? Why be earthly minded, and distracted by the cares and anxieties of the world, as if nothing could be of more importance? You acknowledge that life is miserable; will you therefore be so fond of it, and attached to it, as if it contained every thing that could make you happy? Will you neglect and refuse the only true and substantial happiness, which God offers you, and grasp at all those idle visions and shadows of enjoyment, with which the Devil deludes his foolish victims? You acknowledge that life is uncertain; will you there-

fore delay to act with wisdom? Will you calculate on the future, which is out of your power, with the greatest confidence and security? You acknowledge life to be short; will you therefore throw any of it away, and waste it, as if it were longer than you require, to accomplish the great work which is given you to do in it? Will you suffer the Holy Spirit, whose patience may be wearied, to knock repeatedly at your hearts, without opening them for his admission? Will you refuse to fly to the arms of your merciful Father, while they are yet stretched out to receive and embrace you? Will you reject the Mediation of your Redeemer, while it is yet available to your salvation? Will you spend month after month, and year after year, and still be stopping your ears against the gracious words of the Gospel, which promises you eternal life, if you will repent and turn to God, before the door of mercy is closed? Will you venture to hazard what may be the only "accepted time," the only opportunity of becoming heirs of the kingdom of Heaven?

But you answer, perhaps "this may not be the only 'accepted time;' we may have many years to come, which will afford opportunities quite as good as the present." Merciful God! and because thou waitest to be gracious, and

Thy Goodness still grants time for repentance, ungrateful man thrusts Thee from him, and says, "not yet." And because Thou hast not finally sealed his perdition, he will rashly try how long thy patience can permit his wickedness!

Well then, O foolish sinner, make the bold experiment, if you think it prudent; wait if you are not cut off suddenly, and unexpectedly, in the midst of your sins, wait until you come at last to your death bed, and I will tell you what your feelings at that hour will be. *Then* you will repent, you think: no, I cannot encourage you to hope that you will repent. You will be terrified perhaps, you will be in an agony of fear at the contemplation of your danger, but this will not be repentance. You will see the grave opening her jaws to receive you, and you will shudder at the sight; your sins will crowd in like evil spirits upon your disturbed soul, and "torment you before the time;" you will behold an offended God, clothed with vengeance and terror, and you will dread his awful presence; you will look forwards into the other world, and shrink back again with horror from the woeful prospect; but all this will not necessarily be Repentance; it will only be dismay, and despair; it will not be the Repentance of the gospel; it will not be the Repentance which is immediately followed by

the hope of forgiveness; it will not be the Repentance which is the threshold of eternal life. it will be only the hopeless sorrow of those who are lost, the unavailing regret of those on whom the sentence is all but past; it will be the bitter anguish of impenitence waiting for its punishment. I deny not the efficacy of a death bed Repentance in all cases. No; I know that true Christian Repentance *must* always be efficacious; but the question is, whether such sorrow is Repentance. I doubt not that there is forgiveness through the merits of Christ, at the very last hour, to true and sincere penitents, who have not till then been awakened to a conviction of their sinfulness, and of their need of mercy; but I cannot persuade myself, that the Gospel offers the least hope or encouragement to that wilful sinner, who deliberately determines within himself, that he *will* not repent, until he is about to die, that he will not forsake his sins, until they forsake him, that he will not renounce the world, until he can enjoy it no longer; that he will not seek God, until he is summoned into his presence. No, my brethren, this cannot be true; it is inconceivable that the whole business of religion can be accomplished and salvation obtained under *such* circumstances as these; there is presumption and impiety in the thought. Should you come

t will such a death bed as I have described, you will hold of d perhaps for a minister of the Gospel, and he rrow l endeavour to calm your agitation, and to of thre you from utter despair in your last moments, will a speaking of the infinite love of God, and the ; for sufficient atonement made for the sins of the y of a ole world; but notwithstanding all that he I know say, you will not receive much comfort; you rs be ll think you have delayed too long, and that such a time of pardon, the hour of grace, is past; re is n d I fear you will think but too justly. The t the inister, though he should encourage you not to , who spair, would not have much hope himself; for iction would think such religion as this a mockery nercy of God; and he would know, that if it were God enough, almost every impenitent sinner, whose the death was not instantaneous, would be saved; with or there is hardly one, who is allowed a moment e is a or reflection, that does not die in the torment of unc self-reproach, and in the dread of the Almighty's e the anger.

he w I have set before you a fearful picture of the s pre consequences of a Repentance too long delayed, t is a and of a religion too long neglected; and may it ligi alarm those who are in any danger of such awful d s consequences.

My Brethren, live how you will, be as thoughtless as you will, care not for your souls.

and keep God altogether out of view; in short, enjoy the world, if you can, without suffering any serious reflections to intrude upon your pleasures; still, the end *must* come at last, you *must* be laid upon your bed of death, you *must* arrive at that fatal hour, when you will be *forced* to perceive the vanity of all earthly things, and the supreme importance of the Christian faith. You may plunge into dissipation, your hearts may be overcharged with surfeiting, and your minds with the cares of this world, you may devote your whole soul to enjoyment, or business, and so exclude the hateful thought, for the present; but this cannot last long, and the tormentor *will* force his way.

Oh! then cultivate religion now, that you may be supported in the hour of your greatest need, that death, which *cannot* be avoided, may be deprived of its sting; and that the grave, which *must* receive your bodies, may have no claim to a victory over your souls! For, what *will* you, what *can* you do at the hour of death without religion? How will you possibly sustain that last and greatest trial, both of body and soul, without the comfort of the Gospel? Depend upon it, (unless you are in that most desperate state of utter indifference, and hardness of heart,) religion will have *some* effect upon you at

that time, however little you may have attended to its voice before. But how lamentable would it be to experience only its terrors, when you will need all its consolations! How dreadful will it be to think only of the vengeance of God, when you will most require the assurance of his favour and mercy! When you would raise your eyes to a Redeemer, dying on a cross for your salvation, how afflicting to behold the Son of God, as your Judge, sitting on the tribunal of justice, and about to pass sentence on trembling sinners! How horrible to have nothing but Hell before your eyes, when a prospect of Heaven is the only thing that could cheer the gloom of that awful hour! Yet this is the unhappy condition of many a dying sinner; when he looks for a friend, he finds an enemy; when he desires one to comfort him, he is harassed by a tormentor; when he asks for a medicine, he receives a poison; when he would fly to a Saviour, he encounters a Judge. And will you run the risk of this? Risk! Nay, it is a certainty, if you get into a habit of delay.

"Procrastination is the thief of time;
"Year after year it steals, 'till all are fled;
"And to the mercies of a moment leaves
"The vast concerns of an eternal state."

When Paul "preached of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix

trembled;" it was enough to alarm such a man, certainly; yet what was the result? He made an effort to shake off his fears for the present, and was fool enough still to delay his Repentance, though he saw it to be necessary at that very moment:—"Go thy way for this time, and when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee;" but he was like all who wilfully delay; he never *had* "a convenient season," but died as wicked as he had lived.

I know that one great hindrance to the efficacy of such expostulations as I have now been addressing to you, is, that men think it melancholy to be continually looking forwards to and preparing for death; and so it must be to worldly-minded men, who have set their affections upon the earth, as if it were their home; but no man thinks so who believes the Gospel, and is a sincere disciple of it. What is melancholy? to anticipate the time, when all our pains, and trials, and difficulties, will end? when "our vile bodies shall be changed, that they may be like Christ's glorious body?" when we shall be translated from a world of sin and misery, to a state of eternal glory, and happiness, and perfection? When we shall be like Christ, because "we shall see him as he is?" When we shall wear the crown, for which we have so long been

striving? Is this melancholy? Oh! it is the only consolation of thousands, who are toiling on in their weary pilgrimage. Wretched indeed would they be without this hope, and scarcely able to endure the misery of existence; but with it, they are beyond comparison happier than all the enjoyments of the world can render its most favoured votaries. If you have been in the habit of considering earth as your settled and permanent abode, no doubt it will be sad to reflect that you must so soon depart; but to him, who has been used to regard himself as but a "stranger and sojourner" here, journeying towards a "better country," it is the very reverse of melancholy to look forwards to his arrival there.

If you would be really happy, not only in another world, but even upon earth, for earthly happiness without religion is an idle, deceitful dream, consider I beseech you, this life as a mere journey. It is in truth no more; it is a short journey too, even when most protracted; and God only knows how near each of us may be to the end of it. We have just finished, as it were, another stage of it; but before the new year on which we have entered is concluded, some (I will venture to predict) of you, who now hear me, will be arrived at your everlasting

home. I say this with confidence, because it is a thing, which according to the rules of human probability, is to be expected. Were there not some in this place at the beginning of the present year, who are now in their graves? Recollect with yourselves who they were, and what were their prospects of long life; probably you will find that there were some among them, who had no more reason to expect their death so soon, than the youngest and strongest among you, have to expect yours before another year shall have elapsed. Yet they are gone; and within the next twelve months, some of us will undoubtedly have followed them. I can fancy you all engaged in secret reflection, and enquiring "Is it I? Is it I?" To each individual I answer, it *may* be you; and therefore live as if it certainly would be you. And then, whether it be so or not, it will be at all events a blessing that you have thought so.

Let us all remember, that we have now to account for another year, which is irrevocably gone, and whose testimony, whether in our favour or against us, cannot be altered.

How have we spent it? In indifference and sin? In thoughtlessness and amusement? Were we irreligious at the begining of it, and are we irreligious also at its conclusion? Have we

no more love to God, no more knowledge of our Saviour, no more anxiety about the condition of our souls now, than we had when it commenced? Were we delaying our repentance and reformation then, and are we delaying them up to this very moment? If so, let us humbly and gratefully thank God, that he has had such forbearance with us; let us not think of trying his patience for another year, lest the command be issued, "Cut them down, why cumber they the ground?" But let us earnestly beseech Him to forgive, for Christ's sake, our shameful abuse of his mercy; and let us pray devoutly for the assistance of his Holy Spirit, that we may be both disposed and enabled to spend the remainder of our time, (however long or however short it may be,) to his glory, and our own salvation.

I conclude, my brethren, with wishing you a happy new year; may it be a year of happiness to you in every rational circumstance; but it is chiefly in a *religious* sense that I now wish it. May those from henceforth (by the help of God) begin a new life, who have not yet been born again to righteousness and true holiness! May those be excited to continual perseverance and daily improvement, whose

religious course has commenced before! And may we all, should we come to the end of it, be better Christians than we are now! Should we die during its progress, may it be our portion (through the merits of our Redeemer) to be for ever blessed in that glorious life, in which time shall no longer be computed, and of which ages shall never bring us nearer to the end! Grant this, O merciful Father, for Jesus Christ's sake, our Lord and Saviour. *Amen.*

# SERMON XV.

## TRIBULATION IN THE WORLD.

JOHN xvi. 33.

*In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world?*

It was to his twelve Apostles that our blessed Saviour more immediately addressed these words; and in their case the prediction that in the world they should have tribulation was indeed most fully verified; yet they suffered cheerfully in their master's cause, and through faith in Him, and by the continual support of the Comforter, whom He sent to their aid, they shared in the glorious victory which He, by His own strength, had won.

But not to them alone did the words apply;

where is the man to whom it is not said, "In the world thou shalt have tribulation?" Oh how greatly do they mistake, who expect to find a resting place on earth! Life is from first to last a pilgrimage, and there is no home for any of us on this side the grave! How strange would it have been, had any of the Israelites, in their wanderings through the dreary and barren wilderness, been so pleased with the desolate regions through which they passed, as to say, "it is good for us to be here, let us build houses wherein to dwell!" Is it not more strange that man, journeying through this "howling wilderness" of the world, should so set his heart upon it, as to wish to fix his tent here, forgetful of the Heavenly Canaan that lies beyond? Could he have every thing according to his desire, a tranquil mind to enjoy it, and an eternal security in the possession of it, the case would be different; there might be some excuse for his being contented with his present condition, and for his not aspiring after higher things than this earth can produce. But viewing human life, not as we may dress it up in the false colours of our own imagination, but as it really is, fruitful in troubles and disappointments, destitute of every thing which could of itself impart solid satisfaction for the soul, having no hold even on

such goods as it is capable of possessing, itself every moment insecure, hastening on towards death, the certain conclusion of its brief and ever changing state, how can we be so in love with it, as to seek for nothing better. I cannot express to you the feeling that I entertain concerning the utter insignificance of the highest earthly enjoyments and advantages, for their own sake, and of the folly of those who bestow their affections upon them. They are not worthy a moment's consideration, regarded as to their intrinsic value; nothing is worthy of serious thought, but how we may please God, and save our souls. And in real truth, my brethren, that condition of life is best, which most persuasively convinces us of this; that condition, which opens our eyes to the nothingness of the world, and shakes to its very foundation our confidence in earthly happiness.

It is on this account that affliction is so invariably represented in the Scriptures as a blessing; a true lesson, however hard to learn. Certainly it is not a blessing in any worldly sense; but if it draws us nearer to God, if it turns us from any sinful course, if it weans us from earthly affections, if it forces us to see how vain it is to seek for satisfaction in the pleasures and enjoyments of this present state, if it helps

us on our way towards eternal life, is it not a dispensation of goodness and of mercy? True, *all* the dispensations of Divine Providence, are merciful, and "all things shall work together for good to them that love God;" earthly prosperity, rightly received and used, will become the means of spiritual improvement to those on whom it is bestowed. But prosperity is more liable to be misused than adversity; there is greater temptation, there is more danger in it. When we are pleased with our state, we are too apt to look no further; the world seems to be enough for us, we want no more, we feel no need of God or Heaven. But when trouble and distress come upon us, when we know not whither to fly for comfort upon earth, then, if we have any wisdom, we are disposed to betake ourselves to the only source of consolation, and to devote to God the hearts which before went after their idols. So found David, when suffering under the severest visitations; "It is good for me to have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes;" "before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." And if so holy and pious a man as David, (though he once greatly fell,) found affliction to be necessary for his improvement, can we doubt that it is good for *us*? And if it was sent in mercy to him, who

was "a man after God's own heart," can we doubt that there is a merciful design, when dispensations of a similar nature are appointed to *us?* We *need* to be humbled, we need to be punished, we need to be awakened; God sees it to be necessary for our salvation; perhaps we have abused His gentler mercies, despised His milder remonstrances, refused His more tender invitations and admonitions; then our Heavenly Father must lift his rod, and smite His unruly children, who will not otherwise attend to His voice. But still it is in love, for "the Lord doth not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men, but chastiseth us for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness;" "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."

My Christian friends, it is our want of FAITH that prevents us from viewing these things aright, and makes us murmur and repine at the hardness of our lot. If we really believed that God's Providence was concerned in our afflictions, we could not complain without impious rebellion; nor should we doubt that He had a gracious intention towards us. But we believe too much in chance, and accident, forgetting the assurance of Christ, that "not a sparrow falleth to the ground, without our Heavenly Father,"

and that "the very hairs of our head are all numbered," and we attribute too much to human foresight or imprudence, thinking that it is always through our own care that we succeed in any object, and through our own negligence that we fail, whereas the Scripture says, "Man's goings are of the Lord, how then can a man understand his own way?" And again, "The way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." If a patient does not recover from his sickness, we too often impute the blame to the physician, to improper remedies, to want of attention, when all the means of restoration have been used, which art and kindness could employ. If a man fails in any well devised scheme, we imagine there was some neglect, some error, in the exertion, when probably the greatest circumspection and diligence could have done no more. If any calamity befals us, we reflect upon the immediate cause of it, we think we perceive how it might have been averted, we wonder at our blindness and carelessness in not acting differently, when perhaps the best measures were taken which prudence could suggest. Do we not in all these cases too easily forget that there is an overruling Providence, which will work its way in opposition to man's wisest plans, and most anxious efforts? Are we

not too confidently persuaded that every thing depends upon ourselves? It is our business diligently to use our own means and exertions in every lawful way, but we can never ensure success, the result must always be left to God; He will assist or thwart our measures, as in His wisdom and mercy He seeth to be most expedient for us. This is the uniform doctrine of Holy Scripture, and happy is it for us that it is true, for we know not what is best for us, and often in our error we labour most earnestly after that which would tend to our hurt. Happy for us therefore, that we are in the hands of one, who can disappoint us when it is for our benefit, and we ought to acknowledge His operation, when our best endeavours have been defeated, as well as when they have been made successful. Rarely perhaps can we trace His ways with any certainty, but it would be very useful, and tend to the increase of our faith in this respect, to make them our frequent study; for we may sometimes remark such a chain of circumstances as will powerfully convince us, that the affairs of men are ordered by a Divine interposition; and when we are persuaded that "affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground," we shall surely be disposed to bow with submission to the severest appoint-

ments of God's Providence, and say, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good."

This conviction, that our distresses, whatever they be, do proceed from the hand of God, will prevent us from wasting our time in vain regrets, and set us rather upon enquiring into the cause and purpose of them; why they were sent, and what use we ought to make of them. Have we not loved the world too much? Have we not undervalued, and been unthankful for the comforts we enjoyed? Have we not depended too much on ourselves, and put God out of sight? Have not our hearts been insensible to the miseries of others? Have we not felt too secure of our own happiness? Have we not neglected previous warnings? Is it not needful that our patience and submission to the will of God, should be put to the proof? For remember, resignation is one of the most eminent Christian virtues; and we cannot exercise that virtue, until we are afflicted, nor unless we believe our afflictions to come from God. Have we then learnt to say with Him who was "meek and lowly of heart," "Father, not my will, but thine be done?" Are we ready to yield ourselves humbly to His disposal, and to receive evil from the hands of the Lord, as well as good? In this way we should examine ourselves, that we may

discover, if possible, why we are afflicted, and derive the benefit from the dispensation, which by God's gracious blessing, it is intended to produce. Afflictions, not thus sanctified, are sore indeed; they fall with their whole weight upon the heart, and almost overwhelm it with a load of misery too heavy to be borne. And in that case, grevious as our condition may be, there is no blessing attendant upon it; it is not enough that we find no enjoyment in life, that in this world we have "our evil things," that our affections are forcibly torn away from all earthly objects, that "we go mourning all the day long," and spend our years in melancholy reflections. We may be earthly minded in the midst of our deepest sorrow, and love the world whilst we seem to hate it, lamenting only over the losses we have sustained, and vainly wishing that our happiness was restored, without being at all the better affected towards religion, or studying more earnestly our spiritual interests. This is to be truly destitute; he, who is deprived of his earthly comfort, is yet to be accounted happy, if in its stead he obtains that which is far better; but if he gains nothing in return, how deplorable is his condition! What a miserable wretch was the Prodigal Son, when, after he had "wasted his substance in riotous living, and

there arose a mighty famine in the land, and he began to be in want," he had no longer any means of support, but by filling his belly with the husks which the swine did eat! But his distress opened his eyes to perceive the folly, of which he had been guilty; "when he came to himself," he saw that his wisest course was to fly for refuge to his father's house; and his misery was the cause of his repentance and restoration.

Christ calls all the afflicted to follow the example of this humbled penitent. "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will refresh you; take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Any other mode of seeking rest from the troubles of life, is but like feeding on husks; it cannot satisfy or support the exhausted soul. We look to the right hand and to the left, but there is none to help us; we may meet with sympathy, warm friendship, kind condolence, affectionate expressions, but all this, however well intended, affords no true relief; the burthen is still the same, the thorn is not extracted, it is scarcely even blunted; man can do nothing for us, the world can do nothing; the wells of human comfort are dry, and we can draw no water from

them; we seek rest, and find none, as long as we seek it any where upon earth.

Shall we not therefore accept the merciful invitation of our blessed Saviour, and come unto Him for the refreshment and repose which He offers? Shall we not take His yoke upon us, and learn of Him, who, with all meekness and lowliness of heart, both did and suffered His Father's will, and "for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God?" Shall we not patiently suffer with Him, "who was a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief," that we may also be glorified together? Do we doubt that our affliction will thus be relieved? If we have faith as a grain of mustard seed, though a mountain of sorrow overwhelms our souls, we shall say to it, "Be thou removed, and it shall be done unto us." The promise is plain and positive, without any exception or uncertainty; "I *will* give you rest." What can be more encouraging than this assurance from the lips of Him, who is Truth itself? If we doubt this, we may doubt any thing else that He spake, doubt the whole Gospel. How is it then that in our troubles we ever fail to experience the fulfilment of that faithful promise? Because we neglect to perform our own part; we do not come to

Him; we refuse the invitation; we seek for comfort elsewhere; perhaps we repine under God's visitations; we think them cruel, severe, undeserved; our haughty spirits are not humbled by them; our worldly tempers are not subdued; we still love the world, and the things that are in the world, or at least we try to love them, and try to console ourselves with them; we do not repent of our sins, nor consider that they deserve infinitely greater punishment; we are not convinced of the vanity of earthly happiness; our corrupt hearts are not purified and refined; we are not quickened in the pursuit of heavenly things, as alone worthy of our care and anxiety; we do not devote ourselves simply and unreservedly to God; we do not betake ourselves to Him as our Refuge and Strength, nor pray for His supporting and renewing grace. No wonder if, unimproved, we find not the rest promised only to those, whose afflictions have drawn them to Christ. Oh if any of us be of that number, let us take heed betimes, lest a worse thing happen unto us, or no more calls be addressed to our hardened hearts!

But what is the nature of the rest which we are taught to expect? It is not meant, that immediately all sadness will be banished from our hearts. There is no sin in natural grief, if

it be not too passionately indulged and cherished. Jesus himself wept over Lazarus, and His example has given a sacredness to sorrow. It is the very state of affliction which is pronounced to be blessed; whereas, if grief were altogether quelled, the affliction would not be felt. Support in distress is like courage in danger, and strength in conflict; the state continues, but a power to bear it is imparted. After the labour of the day, a man reclines upon his bed to refresh his wearied limbs; he is still fatigued, and it may be a long time before his strength is recruited, but he feels the enjoyment of repose. In a similar sense we must understand the promise of Christ, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Ye shall still feel your sorrow indeed for a while, but I will increase your strength, and lighten your burthen; I will cheer and revive your spirits; I will set my bow in the dark cloud that hangs over your souls, and ye shall remember the covenant of mercy that I have made with you, your heart shall rejoice in my salvation, and your joy and peace no troubles of the world shall ever be able to take away from you. For I have overcome the world, and ye shall follow in my victorious path; sorrow and trouble shall at length have no power over you,

tears shall be wiped from your eyes, and ye shall partake of the pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore.

My Brethren, accept the invitation of Christ, and trust Him that he will in His own way, and at His own time, make good His gracious promises. Nothing in the world can sustain you under severe affliction, but that hope implanted and nourished in your hearts by His Holy Spirit; for His influence devoutly, earnestly, continually pray; pray that you may acquiesce in the wisdom and goodness of God's appointments; that you may recognise His over-ruling hand in all the events of life; that you may be able to cast all your cares upon Him, as upon a Father who loveth and pitieth all, particularly his afflicted children; that you may forsake all dependance upon earthly things, and be ready to commit yourselves entirely to His disposal; that you may value your souls above all worldly goods, and willingly resign whatever you best love, if he sees the loss to be for your spiritual benefit; that you may always be disposed to seek first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and humbly to permit Him to order all your temporal circumstances, so as they may best conduce to your eternal welfare. Christ says, "What I do thou knowest not now, but

thou shalt know hereafter." The Providence of God works in a mysterious way, and through our own ignorance, and the temptations of Satan, our Faith is sometimes staggered, because we do not understand His proceedings; but let us pray with the disciples, "Lord increase our Faith!" Perhaps the secret will be disclosed to us hereafter, and then we shall see, that those afflictions, which appeared to us to be the heaviest dispensations of his hand, were the instruments by which God bestowed his richest mercies. This is a most wonderful state of existence in which we are placed; we know scarcely any thing, but the path in which our appointed duty lies. Let us not neglect it while we seek to scan the *hidden* ways of God, but proceed in our own onward course, trusting in His providence, praying for His grace, obeying His holy will, and seeking with undivided interest, the blessedness of His everlasting Kingdom. Then, though "we sow in tears, we shall reap in joy; and our light affliction (light, when compared with what we deserve, light, compared with the happiness of Heaven) shall work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen; for the things that are seen, are

temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal."

And if there be any among you, who scarcely know by experience what affliction is, whose life is unclouded, to whom the world seems to abound in happiness, and comfort, take care that you be not seduced to set your hearts on the perishable things of this present time; they will soon pass away, nothing will abide, but the treasures which you shall have laid up in heaven. The afflictions which you see others experience, are a warning to you as well as to them, that happiness is not to be sought for on the earth; wealth cannot purchase it; you know, you see, it cannot; if you abound then, trust not in the good things you possess; if you are poor, covet not to be rich; in whatever condition you are, let your ruling object, and your chief study, be to live as becometh the disciple of Jesus Christ, making all the circumstances of life to minister to the Glory of God, and to the salvation of your own souls.

In all the various states and pursuits to which you may be called, "be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

# SERMON XVI.

## HALTING BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS.

1 KINGS, xviii. 21.

***And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.***

THE history to which these words relate, is both in itself highly interesting, and in its application highly instructive. I will first recall to your recollection the particulars of it, and then proceed to consider the very important lesson which it teaches.

It appears that from the time when Jeroboam, (that rebel against both God and his King, "who made Israel to sin," by leading away the greater part of the nation at once from their true religion, and from their allegiance to their lawful

government,) first set up the golden calves in Dan and Bethel, in opposition to the worship of the Lord of heaven and earth, established at Jerusalem, it appears, I say, from the Sacred History, that from this time, (as was naturally to be expected) the Israelites had been becoming continually more and more idolatrous. Every King, in succession, seems to have been more addicted than the preceding one to the worship of false Gods; and the people, by a natural consequence, fell generally into the evil practices of their rulers, either in obedience to their authority, or through the pernicious influence of their corrupt example. This wickedness perhaps reached its greatest height in the reign of Ahab, of whom the Scripture says, that "he did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him. And it came to pass (as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat) that he took to wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, King of the Zidonians," (heathens, with whom the Israelites were expressly forbidden to intermarry, lest they should learn idolatry from them,) "and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal, in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria; and Ahab made a grove" (in imitation of the wicked heathens

with whom he had connected himself, another thing expressly forbidden by God,) and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger, than all the Kings of Israel that were before him."

Temporal punishments had been tried in the former reign to no purpose. Notwithstanding the total extirpation of two royal families successively, Ahab did not profit by the warnings, but excelled all his predecessors in iniquity, until at length he provoked God to visit the land with a sore famine, for his rebellion. The prophet Elijah had been commissioned to announce to the King the punishment that awaited him; and Ahab, in his blind rage, considering him the *author* of the calamity, while he was only the messenger sent by God to foretell it, (for evil men are accustomed to be offended at those, who faithfully set before them the alarming threats of divine vengeance) instead of endeavouring to appease the just anger of the Almighty, by turning from his sins, sought the life of the prophet, and still continued in his wickedness and idolatry.

At the end of three years, God saw fit to take his hand from off the people, and commanded Elijah to go and show himself to Ahab, and to inform him that the famine was to cease. The

great prophet, uninfluenced by any consideration of personal danger, when he had a divine commission to execute, instantly obeyed. The boldness with which he spoke to the King, who had been so bent on his destruction that he had sent throughout all his dominions to seek him, and had even required an oath of all the people, wherever he sent, that they knew not his place of refuge, was worthy of his sacred character, and of the high office with which he was charged. "It came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that he said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in that they have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim." The wicked king seems to have been appalled and awe-struck at this bold reproof of the prophet, he trembles like a criminal, before the very man whom he had proscribed and hunted from place to place; he perceives a majesty in his deportment, and an authority in his words, that he is unable to resist; and as if he himself were the subject, and Elijah the sovereign, he obeys his commands to summon an assembly of the people on Mount Carmel, together with the ministers of idolatry, the prophets of Baal, and the prophets of the groves. "So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel,

and gathered the prophets together unto Mount Carmel." Then it was that Elijah, the only prophet of the Lord that remained in the land, opposed to no less than eight hundred and fifty priests of the false religion of that corrupted people, stood forth to vindicate the honour, and to prove the power, of the true God whom he worshipped. He comes forward with the confidence of one who knows that if the "Lord be on his side," he need not "fear what man can do unto him," and with the dignity and authority of one who is conscious that he is a champion in the cause of truth and religion against error and superstition, (though humanly speaking the contest appeared as unequal as that between David and Goliath) he demands of the assembled multitude "how long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him, but if Baal, then follow him." The people, it would seem by this question, had been wavering between the idolatrous worship of Baal, and the pure service of the God of Israel. They had not perhaps entirely deserted the true religion, but had mixed it up with the false; they were unstable, unsettled in their minds, retaining some fear of Him who had of old been the God of their nation, and yet seduced by an unaccountable infatuation to "worship them, who by nature were no Gods,

but the work of men's hands, wood and stone." Nothing could be more absurd and inconsistent than such a mixture of religion as this. It was plain that on the one side or the other, they must be in error; their Scriptures, which still remained among them, and of which they must have had some knowledge, were so full of denunciation against idolatry, that an *union* of these two opposite sorts of worship was plainly impossible, they must of necessity reject altogether the one or the other, either Baal, the false Deity of the heathens, or the Lord Jehovah, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, whom their fathers had so long adored; both could not be proper objects of veneration; there was no communion, no similarity whatever between them. This was the light in which Elijah put the question; he told them that they must come to a decision, they must make a preference, and they must adhere to the object of their choice. "If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." This question was brought to an easy issue; I need not now detail the particulars, for you can read them in the sacred history; suffice it to say that the priests of Baal, when challenged to produce some signs of the existence and power of their idol, called upon him in vain "from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal,

hear us;" he had "ears, and yet he heard not, neither was there any breath in his mouth;" "there was no voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded." But at the prayer of his holy prophet, "hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again," the power of the true God was made manifest, by an immediate and convincing miracle; fire descended from heaven and consumed the prophet's sacrifice. "And when all the people saw it" alarmed at the presence of that great Being whose honour they had given to another, and satisfied by this signal testimony to the truth, "they fell on their faces, and said, the Lord he is the God, the Lord he is the God, of a truth there is none like unto thee, O God, there is not one that can do as thou doest."

This is sufficient of the history; I will now proceed to the application of it as I proposed.

My brethren, if there were a civil war raging in this land, (that most dreadful of all scourges, with which a nation can be visited,) if a wicked usurper were to rise up in rebellion against our lawful King, and with the aid of all the unruly, and disaffected, whom he could muster, were to endeavour to seat himself upon

the throne of these dominions, what line of conduct would you adopt? Would you flock to the standard of your sovereign, and hazard your lives and fortunes in defence of the laws, of good order, and of the established government; or would you increase the ranks of the rebels, and add *your* strength to promote the unholy object of pulling down all authority, and spreading confusion, and rapine, and bloodshed, throughout the realm? I ask, which of these two things you would do, because *one* of them you *must* do; you would have no other choice or alternative; you could not remain in quiet indifference, to see which party should succeed; you would not be allowed to stand neuter; you must take an active part, on one side or the other; if not equal to engage in fight, yet you must at least by your favour and countenance, and all the means that might be in your power, abet and encourage, either the loyal subjects, or the rebellious portion of the community. The cry would be heard in every direction, "who is on my side? Who?" And no man could safely answer, "I am on neither side;" for "he that is not with us, is against us," is the universal maxim in such unhappy divisions; and he who is not a friend, is considered as an enemy. Still more dangerous is it to say,

"I am on both sides," for then a man would be regarded as a traitor by both; and whichever might succeed, *he* would be sure of destruction.

Now this is a just illustration of the state in which man is represented by the Gospel to be placed, in regard to his religious conduct. The time was when there was universal peace throughout the dominions of God, when all his creatures were obedient to his laws, and the world, both spiritual and material, with Him for its centre, and its all-pervading bond of union, was beautifully compacted into one harmonious whole. How this order came to be broken, why God permitted his admirable work to be defaced, the unity of his design to be interrupted, the exact symmetry of his arrangements to be discomposed, and the body, formed with such perfect regularity, to be rent and disjointed, so as no longer to admit of the reunion of all its parts, how and why this discord was allowed to enter into his fair creation, is to us one of the greatest of mysteries. But so it was; we see enough on earth to know that all is not now harmony and peace; and the Scriptures inform us, that the confusion commenced with "war in heaven," with contention among spiritual beings, long before this globe and its inhabitants were called into existence. The prime mover of this disorder,

the original author, to whom are to be referred the unhappy consequences resulting from the first breach of peace, by which the affrighted world was shaken and convulsed, is called in the sacred writings Satan, the Devil, the evil Spirit, the Adversary, the God of this world, and by other appellations, generally denoting his enmity to God, and man, and goodness. That the great spirits, whose existence preceded our own, perhaps by millions of ages, were created with a free will to obey or disobey God, and therefore were placed in a state of moral responsibility for their actions, I see no more reason to doubt, than that man exists. What rank that great being, who has since his rebellion been opprobriously named Satan, might have held among these superior intelligences, we know not, but if he was not the highest of all created spirits, doubtless he was at least so great and powerful, that when the fatal vice of ambition took possession of him, he thought it possible to contend with success, even for the throne of God himself. We can form no conception of the immensity of God, who extends throughout all infinity, but we can imagine that in that boundless space, and with his unlimited power, there was room for him to create beings, whose greatness would, to our little minds, also appear infinite. And such in all

probability Satan was, so great, that in his pride he believed himself equal to the greatest; the vastness of his power may have been the very circumstance by which his obedience as a subject was tried. In that obedience he at length failed, and being defeated in his extravagant and impious attempt upon the sovereignty of the world, he was expelled from Heaven, and thenceforward became the eternal enemy of the God, against whom he had madly rebelled.

At the creation of man, God in his wisdom, (and however mysterious to us, doubtless *all* his dealings are wise,) thought good to allow this his inveterate enemy, to use all his skill and art, in endeavouring to seduce the new beings, whom He had placed on the earth. The Scripture informs us with what fatal success that art was employed, and with what persevering industry the same malicious author of man's original sin still labours, and will labour to the end of the world, to tempt the human race from their duty, and obedience to their Creator.

I dwell the more upon this subject, because it is important to the view which I propose in my succeeding discourse to take of the religious condition of mankind, that you should be thoroughly assured that there are two spiritual beings of opposite natures, striving for your

affections and allegiance,—God on the one side, and the Devil on the other. I wish to prove to you, that you are solemnly called upon to make as decided a choice between the two, as the Israelites of old were required by Elijah to make, between the Lord and Baal. And it is the more necessary to press this point, because, clearly as the fact is revealed in scripture, I do not think that it generally obtains the attention and serious consideration which it deserves, as a most important and essential doctrine of the Gospel; I do not think that men are sufficiently impressed with the belief that they must of necessity be subjects either of the Kingdom of God, or of the Kingdom of Satan; I do not think they are so trembling alive as they would be, if they seriously entertained this persuasion, to the momentous nature and consequences of the decision, which it rests with them to make; I think that they would feel a greater horror and disgust at sin, if they were fully persuaded that it is impossible to depart from God, without at the same time yielding themseles up as servants to the Devil; for although in our capriciousness and ingratitude, we may feel no compunction at the thought of offending our heavenly Friend and Benefactor, yet I doubt not that it would be a great restraint upon us to know, that this could not be done

without immediately throwing ourselves into the power of our greatest enemy, who employs all the contrivances of his malice to effect our ruin.

My brethren, shamefully as we now slight the love and mercy of God, whose only desire is to do us good, and unthankfully as we trifle with the patience and long-suffering with which He bears our wickedness, and waits for our return, I make no question that we should equally fly to his outstretched arms for refuge and protection, could we but know the intense hatred which that wicked spirit bears against us, whom we gratify, and whose cause we serve by our impiety; and were but the veil removed from our eyes, so that we could for ourselves see the malicious activity with which he is ever plotting our destruction, and the overwhelming miseries into which it is his sole aim and object to drag us, I am sure we should, in that case, hate and avoid, and earnestly pray to Him, who is "our only safety and defence," to be delivered from so bitter a foe to our happiness. Oh how anxiously we should watch against his cunning! How carefully we should guard against being seduced by his temptations! How warily we should walk, lest we should fall into the snares which he hath laid in our path! How incessantly we should implore the Holy Spirit to take our hearts into his keeping, that

we might not wander from the right path, and be lost in the labyrinths of sin and error, which he has prepared! How fearfully we should shun that dreadful place of weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, that furnace of fire unquenchable, that eternal torment of the never dying worm, that prison of horror and despair, where hope never enters, into which he would lead us!

And have we really such a cruel enemy? And are we truly in his power, and providing for ourselves these horrid wages of his service, when we live in forgetfulness of God, and withdraw ourselves from under his protection? Are not these the mere dreams of a distempered imagination, the absurd fancies of a slavish and fearful superstition? If the Gospel be not true, they *may* be dreams and fancies; for the Gospel is the only authority upon which I propose them to your belief. But if the Gospel be true, nothing is more certain, than that they are most alarming realities. I have before intimated, that men do not in general, attach that importance to the doctrine of diabolical agency, which, from the prominent place it occupies in the Scriptures, it surely deserves; that they do not sufficiently reflect, that the sole question in religion, is, whether they will serve God, or his spiritual enemy Satan, to whom the first introduction, and

the continuance of sin, are wholly to be ascribed. I am bound therefore to make good my position, and before I conclude, to shew you that it *is* a prominent doctrine.

That it is so considered by our Church, you may learn from our Baptismal office. The first question proposed to the persons who undertake the important duty of engaging for the Christian education of the child to be baptized, is, "Dost thou, in the name of this child, renounce the Devil, and all his works?" And shortly afterwards, this prayer follows; "O merciful God, grant that this child may have power and strength to have victory, and to triumph against the Devil, the world, and the flesh." And when he is signed with the sign of the cross, it is declared to be done "in token that hereafter he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under his banner, against sin, the world, and the Devil." Now are these mere words without meaning, or are we in error, when we so solemnly represent it as the first step in the Christian warfare, to renounce the Devil and all his works, to be enlisted under the banners of Christ, as soldiers prepared to fight against his great adversary? Or is it actually true, that this view of our condition is furnished by the revelation of God himself, and

that there really does exist a spiritual enemy, the author of sin, and whose servants we must be, if not the servants of God? Hear what the Scriptures say on the subject. What do they inform us was the cause of the unhappy fall of man? His complying with the temptation of Satan, in opposition to the command of God. For what purpose did Christ come into the world? "That he might destroy the works of the Devil." Why did he assume the "flesh and blood," the mortal nature of man? "That through death, he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil." Hebrews ii. 14. Who exerted all his artifice and ingenuity to defeat that merciful purpose? Satan, the tempter, who proposed himself as an object of religious worship, in place of the Lord God, whom only we are bound to serve. Matthew iv. Who hinders the seed of the Gospel from taking root in the hearts of careless hearers? "The Devil cometh, and taketh away the seed that was sown in their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved." Luke viii. 12. Who soweth tares among the wheat? "The enemy that sowed them is the Devil," and the "tares are the children of the wicked one." Matthew xiii. 39. To whom is "the Gospel hid?" To those, "whose eyes the God of this world hath blinded, lest the light of

the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." 2 Corinthians iv. 3, 4. Why are we exhorted to be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, and to put on the whole armour of God?" That we "may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil." Ephesians vi. 10. Why to take "the shield of faith?" That we "may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." Why commanded to be "sober and vigilant?" Because our "adversary, the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." 1 Peter v. 8. Who are they that are "dead in trespasses and sins?" Those that "walk according to the Prince of the power of the air, the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience." Ephesians ii. 1, 2. In short, the Scriptures, in the plainest terms, and with a frequency of repetition, which can hardly have escaped the notice of the most careless reader, ascribe sin to the suggestions of this spiritual enemy of God and man. "Ye are of your father, the Devil," (said our Saviour to the unbelieving Jews,) "and his lusts ye will do." John viii. 44. "Some are already turned aside after Satan," says St. Paul, of certain persons who had fallen from Christian purity of life. 1 Timothy v. 15. "He that committeth sin," (says St. John,)

" is of the Devil; for the Devil sinneth from the beginning. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil; whosoever doeth not righteousness, is not of God." 1 John iii. 8, 10. Did Judas betray his master? It was because " Satan had entered into him." Luke xxii. 3. Did Peter with oaths deny him, after the most solemn protestations of fidelity? It was because Satan had " desired to have him, that he might sift him as wheat," Luke xxii. 31. and tempted him by over confidence. Did Ananias lie unto the Holy Ghost? It was Satan who " put " that wickedness " into his heart." Acts v. 3. Did Elymas the sorcerer seek to " turn away from the faith," one who was " desirous to hear the word of God?" It was because he " was full of all subtilty and mischief, a child of the Devil." Acts xiii. 8—10. Athough I cannot suppose, that, after this accumulation of authorities, you need any more scripture proofs of the doctrine which I have been maintaining, yet I cannot refrain from calling your attention to one other striking passage, which expressly declares, that the distinction between a christian and unchristian life, is no less than that of being under the dominion of God, or under the dominion of the Devil. When St. Paul was miraculously converted, and our blessed Saviour gave

him his commission to go unto the Gentiles, it was for this purpose that he was so sent, "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the *power of Satan unto God.*" Acts xxvi. 18.

I fear I have exhausted your patience, but I was willing to put this point beyond all controversy, because (as I have said more than once,) I do not think that an adequate degree of importance is attached by men in general, and even by some who think seriously about religion, to a truth so plainly revealed, as that of the zeal and active influence of the evil spirit upon the hearts of men, who strives even with the most crafty subtilty, and the most unwearied industry, to draw them away from the service of God, and to make them "workers of iniquity" like himself; a truth, which renders it evident, that we have no choice but between two masters, the one holy and merciful, and desirous that we should be made partakers of his holiness, and experience his mercy; the other, wicked and malicious, and anxious that we should participate in his wickedness, and be involved in his damnation.

In my next discourse, I propose, upon the grounds of this argument, to shew you the extreme folly of being undecided between the opposite services of these two masters, and the

extreme importance of coming to a right determination, in choosing which of them you will follow, for remember, that to whomsoever "ye yield yourselves servants to obey, *his* servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin (and therefore of Satan,) unto death, or of obedience (and therefore of God,) unto righteousness," and eternal life. Romans vi. 16.

# SERMON XVII.

## HALTING BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS.

1 KINGS xviii. 21.

*And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.*

In my former discourse on these words, I observed that the choice which is proposed to us in regard to our religious conduct, is very much of the same nature with that which would be offered, if this country were unhappily the scene of a civil war; that, as in the latter case, we should not be allowed to hesitate and waver between rebellion and loyalty, but must of necessity join one party or the other, either those who should support the cause of their lawful king, or those who should be for wresting the

sceptre of authority from his hands, and bestowing it on a usurper; so in religion, we have but the choice of two opposite parties; there is no middle state between that of faithful devotion to God on the one hand, and that of attachment to his enemy, Satan, on the other.

That the matter is so represented in the Holy Scriptures, I proved to you by abundant references to their authority; nor do I see how it is possible for you, as believers in those Scriptures, to entertain the slightest doubt of the fact. This is not one of those difficult and controverted questions, which afford room for much argument on both sides. I know nothing more clearly stated in the whole volume of inspiration, than, that the first fall of man, was owing to the temptation of the evil spirit; that our Saviour came to counteract the effects that he had wrought, to deliver mankind from his influence, and to save them from his power; that all opposition to the faith and the holiness of the Gospel, is *his* work; and that in consequence, all ultimately abandoned sinners will, as belonging to his party, and having favoured his cause, be consigned to the place of punishment prepared originally for him and his angels. It was of course this scriptural view of the origin of sin, that induced our church, as I stated this morning,

to require it as the very first stipulation and vow on the part of those who are to be admitted by Baptism into the Christian Covenant, that they should "renounce the Devil and all his works," and to enlist them as soldiers prepared to fight under the banners of Christ, against this spiritual adversary. And we ought to consider, that as Christians, we are engaged on the side of God, our lawful King, in opposition to a wicked rebel, who would, if it were possible, trample under foot, all his wise, and just, and salutary laws, subvert his paternal government, and seat himself as a tyrant on the throne of the universe: nor is the desertion of God's service, any less than a direct adoption of the views and practises of his opponent.

I must beseech you not to dismiss this view of the subject with thoughtless ridicule, nor to entertain it with a mere careless curiosity, as if it were a gross superstition, or an uncertain speculation. To say nothing more now of the authority of Scripture, which I have shown to be decisive on the doctrine, it is the most rational and probable account of the origin of sin and all evil, that has ever been given. Nothing has more perplexed persons who have meditated much on the constitution of the world, than the existence of evil in a creation that proceeded

from the hands of a Being of perfect goodness. Still here it is; that we cannot deny; we see it, and feel it, and suffer it; and at the same time we know that God must be good, as we have such innumerable proofs of his goodness around us, and if He were *not* good, *all* would be evil. Yet why is there *any* evil? I say that it is impossible to give a more satisfactory explanation of this great mystery, than that which we collect from the Bible; viz. that God, long since, in the past ages of eternity, created a race of spiritual beings, to whom he granted a freedom of will and action, and whom he placed in a state of moral trial, as he subsequently did man, *i. e.* required of them submission to his laws; that one of superior rank failed in this trial, rebelled against his authority, and with all his followers was expelled from the happy community in which he lived; and that he has permission, until the great day of judgment, to resist God, (and no doubt in so doing continually to "heap up wrath unto himself against the day of wrath,") by endeavouring to seduce mankind from his worship, and to bind them with the chains of sin, and so make them worthy to share with him in the horrors of his place of torment, when the wicked shall finally be severed from among the just.

We are so apt to associate the absurdities of popular superstition, with our ideas of the evil spirit, that we in general very much underrate the importance of the character which he sustains in the system of religion, which has been revealed to us. But when we seriously consider what the representations of scripture actually are on the subject; that he was the leader of a great rebellion in heaven itself; that he was the contriver of our first parents' fatal transgression; that he is spoken of, under various denominations, as the author of, and the object of worship in, all the false religions that have ever prevailed in the world; that the Son of God was manifested upon earth, expressly for the purpose of undoing the dire effects of his malice, according to the original promise, that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head;" that both bodily diseases and mental infirmities are frequently ascribed to his influence; that, as the author of every temptation, he must be omnipresent upon earth, and have the power of access to every mind at every moment; that our Saviour speaks so exultingly of his "fall from heaven," as if it were a most important triumph; that he was permitted to try by strong temptations the Redeemer himself, both at the beginning of his ministry, and just before his death; that he is described by such

high and significant titles, "the God of this world, the Prince of the power of the air, the Prince of darkness, the Destroyer, the Angel of the bottomless pit, the Adversary, the Accuser;" when, I say, we consider how very remarkable an influence is thus attributed to him, we surely cannot otherwise regard him than as a vast spirit, essentially opposed to God, as the promoter and patron of all wickedness, and the original Cause of all misery, both that which is endured upon earth, and that which will be suffered to all eternity, by those who will eventually fall under the severity of divine vengeance.

Indeed, my brethren, it appears to me from this representation (and I speak it with a full persuasion of the truth of the opinion,) that we can have no choice, but between this evil spirit and the Holy Spirit of God: that both are ever active in endeavouring to obtain the guidance of our hearts and lives; that our minds are, as it were, the theatre in which the two rival and opposite powers contend; and that our freewill consists in this, that we are at liberty to choose whose suggestions we will follow; that all good thoughts arise from the one source, and all evil thoughts from the other; that we *must* therefore be subjects and servants of *one* of these spiritual beings, either of the holy, and wise, and merciful

God, to whom we owe our creation, our preservation, our redemption, and all our means of happiness both here and hereafter; or of that rebellious and malicious enemy of the Deity, all of whose efforts are directed to the encouragement of sin, and the consequent involving of man in everlasting ruin and misery.

The question is not therefore, whether you will follow *either* of these parties—for one of them you must; there is a boundary line between them, and marked and distinct as that line is, it is so narrow that there is no *footing* upon it, there is no such thing as standing in neutrality upon it; you must be on one side or the other, there is no *independent* party, the world is divided between these two masters, and you must of necessity either love God and hate his enemy, or hate God and love his enemy, you cannot love both, or hate both at the same time; that is a contradiction of which the mind is incapable, for they are entirely and irreconcileably opposed to each other. Here is on one side, God, and truth, and holiness, and happiness; on the other, Satan, and falsehood, and sin, and misery. You see what an utter dissimilarity there is between the conflicting forces; how is it possible for them to meet in any middle point, or on any common ground. No, my brethren, no terms of peace

can be imagined in which they can both agree; the warfare between them must be eternal. The question is, *which* you will choose; which side it is most prudent, most reasonable, most safe to join?

Are you yet in doubt? Do you hesitate! Do you halt, like the Israelites, between two opinions? Why, even while thus undetermined, while thus unresolved, as you suppose, between the two, you are on the side of Satan. For the Scripture says, that the servants of God must be *decided* servants; "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and all thy soul, and all thy strength;" so that if your affections are unsettled, and divided, you do not belong to God, for he demands them without reserve. The Scripture says, that you must *follow* Christ; so that, even if you are standing still, as you may fancy, you do not belong to God, because you are not *followers* of your Saviour. The Scripture says that they are the Sons of God, who are led by the Spirit of God; so that you are not his sons, if you refuse to be *led* by his Spirit. You have received a call to go into God's vineyard and work. What wages can you expect, if notwithstanding that call, you stand in the market-place all the day idle? You may say we have taken no active and decided part in favour of Satan,—we

have given him no absolute preference, we are not determined infidels, or impious blasphemers, or profligate sinners:—very probably. But have you taken an active or decided part in favour of God? Have you given *Him* any absolute preference? Are you stedfast believers, or devout worshippers, or blameless walkers in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord? If not, God will not acknowledge you for his children and servants, merely because you have not declared open war against him, but have only treated him with indifference. Suppose you were to die in this state of irresolution and neutrality,—remember there is only a heaven and a hell hereafter; to which of them do you think you would go? To heaven? Why so? Merely because you have not daringly blasphemed God, not openly rejected the Gospel, not proudly gloried in sin, not actively encouraged impiety, and irreligion? If this were the way to heaven, what a tissue of falsehoods the Gospel would have published! What folly to talk of heartfelt repentance, and lively faith, and fervent prayer, and sin subduing holiness, and active charity! What absurdity to preach about seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, of setting the affections on things above, of forsaking all to follow Christ, of taking up the cross daily, of

entering in at the strait gate, of cutting off a right hand, and plucking out a right eye if they offend, of doing all to the glory of God, of fighting the good fight of faith, of running with patience the race that is set before us, of being crucified unto the world, of working out our salvation with fear and trembling, as if it were a difficult thing to go to heaven, or there were any real danger of not being saved! Nay, nay, you would not be admitted into heaven among the true worshippers of God, and the devoted disciples of Christ, and the zealous champions of a living faith, and the determined enemies of sin, upon your plea of merely never having denied, or reviled, or trampled under foot the Christian religion. Our Saviour says, "if any man serve me, let him follow me, and where I am, there shall also my servant be; if any man serve me, him will my Father honour." Living then in the undecided state which I have described, you surely have not served Christ, nor followed him, nor will his Father honour you; you have never acknowledged Him, therefore neither will He acknowledge you; "depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels," and for all those who have not "chosen the good part."

Well then, you perceive that you *must* make

a choice; but what is to determine you? How is the balance to be struck? Were the great Prophet Elijah here, and the occasion demanded such a display of God's superior claim to your service, I doubt not that he would as easily convince *you* as he did the assembled idolaters on Mount Carmel, and force you to exclaim, "the Lord, He is the God, the Lord, He is the God." But what can *I* do, or what can *I* say, that shall be sufficient for this purpose? My brethren, I can only tell you what you know already; I can only admonish you to reflect that the question you have to settle, is whether you will be everlastingly happy, or everlastingly miserable. But surely this fact, if you believe it, is as convincing as any miracle could possibly be. What! doubt whether you will serve God, or Satan, when the one offers you Heaven, and the other proposes Hell? Granted that the offer of Heaven be accompanied with commands for most severe self-denial, with the appendage of the most difficult struggles, and the sorest afflictions in life: and that to the proposal of Hell is attached the promise of all the pleasures that the world can afford; I say, even granting (what in truth is not the case, but granting for argument sake) that on this side of the grave the service of God is all toil and pain, and the service of Satan, all ease and indulgence;

still my brethren, Heaven and Hell! Happiness eternal, or woe eternal! What a contrast! And still doubt? Why it is absolute madness! But is this true? Throw away your bibles, and never come here again, if it is *not*. Give yourselves up to every vice you love, plunge into debauchery, riot in intemperance and excess, follow all the evil inclinations of your heart, despise all checks of conscience, laugh at religion as error or hypocrisy, shake off the chains of virtue as a slavish bondage, quiet your apprehensions of death, as an unmanly and superstitious fear, allow yourselves an unbridled license to think, and say, and do what you will if heaven and hell are fables. But first be *sure* that they *are* fables; do not leave a *doubt* on the subject, if you mean to live without any regard to them; for that would be miserable; it would disturb all your pleasure; you could not *enjoy* your worldly indulgences in such an uncertainty; you would live in anxiety, and die in horror. And *are* you sure that they are fables? Have you decided that the Gospel, which has now for eighteen hundred years made such a noise in the world, which has been received by so many millions of men as the truth of God, which has been attested by the unwearied zeal of so many disciples, and the blood of so many martyrs, which has fashioned

the lives of so many sincere believers, which has enabled them to sustain with cheerfulness so great afflictions, and to meet death with such strong hopes and triumphant exultations, have you positively decided that this Gospel, which has entirely engaged the hearts and affections of such multitudes of wiser and better men than yourselves, is a mere imposture of crafty priests, or a mere delusion of ignorant fanatics? Nay, could I collect your sentiments individually, I know what you would answer: you would all say that you are Christians, and believe the Gospel. And yet are you halting between two opinions? What! *believe* the gospel, and doubt whether you shall faithfully adopt its doctrines, and sincerely practice its commands! *Know* that there is a Heaven, and doubt whether you shall strive to be admitted into that eternal state of happiness and rest! Know that there is a Hell, and doubt whether you shall endeavour with all your care and energy to avoid that dreadful place of woe unutterable and interminable! Oh! my brethren, to what danger that hesitation exposes you; only consider how short your time is, how rapidly it passes away, how uncertain is the period of its conclusion, how unexpectedly you may be cut off before you have come to a decision! You are debating what you shall do, and the curtain falls,

night closes in, and you have no more opportunity of doing *any* thing; you are hurried away to the grave, where there is no knowledge nor device, nor wisdom; where you must await the consequence of your indecision; and that consequence certain and eternal ruin! Indeed, indeed, you have no time for indecision; the hours are moving on in their silent progress while you yet delay, and the fatal die will be cast *for* you, if you do not speedily resolve for yourselves.

But I will suppose you to *be* resolved. *What* is it that you are resolved on? not to be nominal and formal Christians? that you are already. Not to profess a cold and heartless assent to the truth of the Gospel? that you are not accused of withholding. Not to attend on the outward ordinances of religion? that I do not know that you neglect. Not to think occasionally of God with reverence, of Christ with gratitude, of heaven with delight, of hell with abhorrence? all these thoughts I can easily believe that the most careless among you in some favourable moments of reflection entertain. What is it then that you have resolved on? To *be* Christians; to be sincere and genuine disciples of the Gospel; to renounce the devil and all his works with utter detestation; to love God with supreme and con-

stant affection; to do his will with unwavering fidelity; to subdue all sinful inclination; to discard all earthly pleasures and engagements, which are dangerous to the hope of salvation; and all this in firm reliance on the merits of our blessed Saviour, not being "ashamed of the gospel of Christ," and with earnest prayer for the aid of the Holy Spirit, to crown your endeavours with success. If such is your resolution, however long delayed, it is a wise one at last, it is a safe one, it is a happy one. But stop not to *applaud* the resolution; good as it is, it is worth nothing yet, unless your whole lives give practical evidence that it has been formed. Study to live from this time as servants of the God whom you have chosen, and you will have ample time and cause *in eternity* to congratulate yourselves on having at length made so happy a choice.

Allow me in conclusion to read to you a very interesting passage from the last chapter of the book of Joshua, which is much to the purpose of my present discourse, and God grant you grace to act as the persons therein spoken of expressed *their* determination to do. "Now therefore (said Joshua to the Israelites, after having recounted to them the many and great mercies which God had shewn to them and to their fathers) now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in *sincerity* and

in *truth*, and put away the Gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood and in Egypt, and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you *this day* whom ye will serve, whether the Gods which your fathers served, which were on the other side of the flood, or the Gods of the Ammonites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other Gods; for the Lord our God, He it is that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed. And the people said unto Joshua, the Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey."

I trust, my brethren, that some of you who may have been wavering hitherto, have come this day to the same holy resolution; if not, I have spent my breath in idle words, idle as to your profit, but not perhaps without their weight as adding to your condemnation; for God himself has said "If thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his evil ways, he shall die in his iniquity." But let me

humbly hope that they have not been scattered altogether by the way side, so that the devil shall be able to snatch them at once out of your hearts, nor upon a rock, so as to be incapable of taking deep root, nor among thorns, so as to be choked as soon as they spring up; but that in some instances at least they have fallen upon good ground, which, by the blessing of God, will bring forth a plentiful produce of true religion and holiness of life. *Amen.*

# SERMON XVIII.

## GROWTH IN GRACE.

2 PETER iii. 18.

*Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.*

It is a common observation that "as a man grows older he grows wiser." Certainly in all reason it should be a true one. As infants we know nothing; but we soon begin to acquire ideas, and by daily experience and acquaintance with men, and books, and nature, and the business of life, our minds expand, our knowledge accumulates, like a ball of snow by constant rolling. This is a remark applicable to man in general; we may see it more distinctly verified, if we take the case of persons engaged in particular arts, studies, or professions. We should

think it a reproach if they did not improve in knowledge or in practical skill as they advanced in age. The infirmities of old age, it is true, sometimes put a stop to this advancement, especially in those instances in which bodily vigour and exertion are required; but with this occasional exception, it is to be expected as a general rule, that there should be a continual progress from the beginning to the end of life. One man indeed, by superior abilities, or greater industry, or by having more opportunities of improving himself, may outstrip another who is his senior in years; but still all (some at a quicker, some at a slower pace) are moving onwards in their several paths, continually gaining a step towards perfection.

Shall the children of this world "be so wise in their generation," and "the children of light" be so much less wise?" Shall we, in the point of earthly knowledge and earthly attainments, almost invariably proceed according to this rule, and not think it a disgrace if the like progress is undiscernible in our spiritual condition? Shall man, merely as man, advance in experience and information as a student, as an artist, as a mechanic, as a man of business, and be constantly making some further profieiency in the line to which he devotes his chief attention,

but the same man as a Christian, stand still, or even go back? Shall we, in pursuing the inferior and less important ends of life, be ever approaching nearer and nearer towards excellence, but care not how much we halt and linger, when that which should be the one great end and object of our existence, is the matter proposed to us? This is to be the subject of my discourse, and although it is a most useful enquiry at all times, I have selected it the rather, as being particularly appropriate to the present occasion, because since we are now thus assembled on the last sabbath day in this present year, it is desirable that our meditations should have some reference to the progress of time, and I know of no way in which they can be more suitably and profitably employed, than on the question whether "our growth in grace," our increase in Christian attainments, during the past year, has at all corresponded with our advance in life. For if it has not, I fear, my brethren, we must reckon this year as lost; I do not see of what advantage it has been to us, if we are exactly where we were at its commencement; we surely have lived all this time in vain, if our spiritual state is not at all improved.

You question this statement perhaps, and ask how can it be as I have represented? Have

we not spent this year in as Christian a manner as any former one? Have we not attended to our religious duties as carefully as we used to do? Have we not prayed, and read the Scriptures, and heard sermons, and observed the public ordinances of the church, and given alms, and done numerous acts of piety and virtue, too many to specify or remember in the course of all this time? And are not all these things to be put down in our favour? Are they not all to be added to the previous sum of our good works, so as to swell the amount of our claims upon the mercy of God?—No; this is not growth in grace—it is not measured by such a scale. If it were, then every one, who is in a Christian state at all, would be growing in grace daily; for surely there is not a day of his life that he does not perform some religious duties. But these he may continue performing for years, with the greatest regularity, and yet still remain in the very same state of grace, without having advanced one step towards Christian perfection. For by the word "grace" here is meant, the spiritual condition of a man, the Christian principles and affections that exist in his heart. It is these that must be improved and increased; outward actions we overlook in such an inquiry as this, except as far as they can safely be taken as an evidence of the state of the soul.

Most undoubtedly all visible conduct will improve in proportion to the advance that has been made by "the hidden man of the heart;" and therefore, if by reflecting upon the general tenor of our practice, we can be at all helped to ascertain the disposition of our minds, we may certainly employ it as a test; yet we should at the same time be careful, how we depend too much upon it, liable as we are to deceive ourselves, and to ascribe many actions that we do, to better motives than really influence us. For after all, it is the heart we are to arrive at; *its* secrets we should explore by whatever means; and therefore our self examination must not consist of a mere review of the history of our lives, but must penetrate deeper, searching into the actual condition of our souls. The water in a well, will afford the same supplies as formerly, if it remains at a uniform height; but we wish to see if the well gets fuller, and for that purpose we do not calculate the quantity drawn from it, but we look into it, we sound it, we measure it.

You will allow that I have made a correct distinction in what I have said, and that "growth in grace" cannot possibly mean the having performed an additional number of religious actions, from this; that a man shall have done many more or much fewer of such actions, in one given

space of time, than in another equal space, and yet have experienced no change in his spiritual condition; for the whole difference may have depended upon the increase or diminution of his means and opportunities; in one year, for instance, he may have been possessed of a considerable income, and may have expended a large proportion of it in works of charity and benevolence; in the next, he may have been reduced to poverty, and possessed no more than he required for his own neccessary maintenance. Are we to judge of this man's charitable disposition from the history of his almsgiving in those two periods? of course not. There could be no reason to suppose that his heart had not continued as much disposed to relieve the distressed, when he was himself destitute, as when he was in flourishing circumstances. And so in all other cases: the grand point therefore is, how our hearts are affected; good works, religious actions, will of necessity result from the grace that is within us, if there is no insuperable outward hindrance; but God judgeth the heart, and so must we also, if we would discover our Christian and spiritual state.

It may appear a needless waste of time, to press this distinction so much upon your attention, as it is one, you imagine, that all men will readily make. But there is reason to fear, that they are,

for the most part, more prone to conduct the examination of themselves by considering what they have *done*, and what they have *not done*, and thus to form a judgment of their progress, than by prying narrowly into their own hearts, and ascertainining the actual state of them at the time.

Searching the heart is to all, difficult, and most upleasant; difficult, because it requires so much close thought, an exertion which few will make, and much quiet meditation, for which few will allow themselves the leisure; and unpleasant, both on account of the labour, and of the humiliating discoveries to be expected; consequently, indolent persons, and those who aim at self-satisfaction, are ready to put up with any substitute for this tedious and disagreeable process; they find it more easy to take a hasty survey of a certain portion of time, and thence to conclude whether they are improved or not. I will take a palpable instance, by way of illustration, not as a specimen of serious self-examination. Suppose a drunkard were to congratulate himself on his advance towards sobriety, because on looking back on the last month or year, he recollects that he has less frequently indulged himself in his favourite vice, than in the month or year preceding; yet perhaps all the while he hates

not his evil habit, nor repents of it one iota more than formerly, but the want of money, or some other circumstance, has intervened to check it in its course. More respectable characters than he may make the same mistake. You cast up your accounts, and perceive that you have given more in charity this year than in the former, or you have attended public worship more regularly, or you have made a decided step in coming to the Lord's table, a duty you never performed before, or you have introduced social prayer into your fafamily, or you have not been so gay, less frequent in your attendance at balls and theatres, less expensive in dress and vanity; or you have occasionally taken up the Scriptures or a religious book to read, a thing you hardly remember to have done since you were a child; calling to mind I say, some or other of these circumstances, you discover a great improvement, you think you are grown quite religious. But you must look farther, you must dive deeper; you must trace effects to their causes, you must follow your conduct back to the motives, from whence it proceeded. Natural tenderness of feeling, or a worse cause, ostentation, may have increased the amount of your charitable donations; or there may have been nothing but formality in your religious observances, although increased in number and in kind. Ill health, or

unavoidable seclusion from the world, (perhaps much to your regret) may have diminished your gaieties, and the expense attending them; the Scriptures, and books of piety, you may have read with reluctance and aversion, as a self-appointed task; so that after all, though you imagined you have made considerable progress in the last year, you may be in no better state of mind, no better Christian than at its commencement.

I grant however, that all these things may be evidences of spiritual improvement; all that I assert is, that you must come to this point at last, or you do nothing by examining yourselves in such a way; you must endeavour to ascertain whether your heart is in a more religious frame; for all your advancement in the externals, if it were a thousand times greater, without the other, would be nothing.

I wish to be understood, as speaking of persons who have really set out upon a Christian course, who have *begun* in grace. I am desirous that we should all consider seriously with ourselves, whether we are going on, whether we are growing, whether the Gospel is fixing its roots deeper in our hearts, whether the leaven is spreading more and more, and pervading the whole substance with which it is mingled,

whether we can mark a gradual increase of Christian sentiments and affections within us. For surely it is a wild imagination, that any one can spring up at once to full maturity, can come in a moment to a perfect man, to the "measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ;" and surely it is but little less extravagant to think, that we can *ever* arrive at perfection, even by slow degrees, in this short life of infirmity and imperfection. Yet persons, who are very far indeed from entertaining enthusiastic notions, too readily persuade themselves, not indeed that they have arrived at Christian perfection, (for that they would justly think extreme presumption) but that they have advanced as far as it is necessary to go, that they have attained as much of the Christian character as is required or desirable, that it would be imprudent or dangerous to aim at any greater degrees of it. They represent to themselves a certain state of mind, which they consider to be the Christian state, that must be acquired, and then they are as good Christians as it is expedient, or perhaps possible to be. And what is this state? Of course it must consist of all the Christian graces spoken of in the Gospel; the ingredients must be the love of God, trust in him, humility, charity, purity, resignation, heavenly affections, hope,

and other qualities and virtues; if one of which be absent, the Christian character is not complete. So far we all agree; but is there any fixed measure for all these dispositions, or may they exist in different degrees of strength? The measure of them cannot be determined; they vary perhaps in every individual; perhaps no three persons have arrived at exactly the same degree in any one of these graces. What then shall be taken for our standard? How much love of God ought we to have? How much faith? How much humility? How much charity? How much of all the rest? Where will you set your limits, and say, "thus far I will proceed, and no further?" You can find no point at which to stop; at whatever stage you are arrived, you may always go further; and until it is impossible to advance, how can you be satisfied with the progress you have made? Indeed, true "Grace" is of that restless and eager quality, so panting after the distant goal of perfection, that it will not be satisfied to halt any where short of it; it will not be checked in its course, or bridled in, it will push on, and exert all its vigour to the last, as if nothing were done, while any thing yet remained to be done. Thus it was that the Grace of God acted on St. Paul; he says, he had no thought that he had already obtained his

object, or was already perfect; he counted not himself to have apprehended, "but this one thing (says he) I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Now if you consider St. Paul to be a character worthy of imitation (as you certainly must, even if he had not said "Be ye followers of me as I am also of Christ,") if you reflect how very far you are behind him in all spiritual attainments, at how great a distance from the point at which he had arrived, when he wrote the words which you have just heard, and yet observe, that he thought nothing of the proficiency which he had made, but put it all out of sight, and was ever straining onwards after higher degrees of perfection, you must be forced to acknowledge that there can be no resting place at which you may repose yourself and say, "now I am as perfect a Christian as I have any occasion to be, I may spare myself the trouble of striving for any greater excellence." Indeed the supposition that any one deliberately entertains such an opinion of himself, or has formed such a resolution, implies so total an absence of all right Christian sentiments, that it is a direct contradiction to the notion of his being in a state of

grace at all; but a man often unconsciously *acts* upon principles which he would disavow, if plainly exposed to him, and which he really does not know to be his own. Thus it is in the present case; if we are satisfied with our present condition, not desiring any improvement in it, but thinking all is right, that we shall do very well if we just keep our ground, and that we shall be getting too far, if we aspire at any thing higher, our *principle* is, that just so much religion as ours is sufficient, that there is no need of our being better Christians than we are at this present moment.

But how have we been persuaded to be thus satisfied with ourselves? Where have we learnt that *our* measure of religion is the precise quantity which a man is required to have? We have not learnt it from this Scripture, "Be ye perfect, as your Father that is in heaven is perfect;" we have not learnt it from this, "When ye have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants, we have done that which was our duty to do;" we have not learnt it from this, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself;" neither have we learnt it from that which says that "Christ left

us an example that we should follow his steps, who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth;" nor from either of these, "every one that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure;" and "as he who has called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; nor finally, (for I will not add more than this one passage) have you derived that opinion of the sufficiency of a certain degree of religion from this admirable prayer of the same great apostle for the Colossians "we do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness."

These passages do but express the general tenor of the Gospel on this subject; nothing is more plain than that the Christian character is not supposed to be any fixed and definite state, but rather a continual progress towards perfection, a state of growth and increase, never capable of being brought to such full completion in this life, and maturity in this world, as that any one may say "it is enough; nothing more can be, or

at least, need be added." I must repeat therefore what I said at the beginning, that if we have not grown in grace during the last year, if there has been no accession to the spiritual condition in which we then were, though we should not have declined, though we should be precisely as we were at the commencement, I fear we have lost a year, and this is a matter worthy of most serious and anxious investigation. For what have we been doing all this time, if we are not at all improved in godliness? if we find the very same deadness and coldness of heart as formerly? if our faith is just as weak? if our prayers are equally languid and formal, or subject to as much interruption from distraction of thought? if earthly affections have the same power over us? if we are just as liable to sudden emotions of anger, or envy, or pride, or any other evil passion? if we have not acquired fresh experience of our sinfulness, and consequently a deeper sense of our need of Christ to justify, and of the Holy Spirit to support and sanctify us? What have we been doing, if no one Christian grace has been so exercised as to have become more perfect? Have we not as Christians been quite stationary, while all around, and we ourselves, perhaps, in other respects, have been making rapid progress?

But this is a different enquiry, you may say;

Who can ascertain whether he is in the very same state of mind now, in which he was twelve months ago? Who can determine whether he has or has not improved in his religious condition since that time? Some, I have no doubt, *can* determine this; some are conscious to themselves that their views, feelings, and principles, have undergone a considerable change for the better within the year; their eyes have been opened to see things in a new light. To them I will only say, be thankful that by the grace of God you are what you are, and take care that the grace which has been given you, be not in vain; rest not where you are, but forget those things which are behind, and reach forth towards those which are before; strive the more diligently "to make your calling and election sure," add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly-kindness, and to brotherly-kindness charity;" never stop as if you had "already attained, or were already perfect," but let "onward" be your motto, and your prayer that God will carry you from "strength to strength," and "having begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus."

Others perhaps are equally conscious that

they have to lament a sad and manifold declension in grace. Alas! you are in a most dangerous state, scarcely any more so. Let this thought alarm and arouse you; take heed betimes, lest "you draw back unto perdition;" the down hill way is very steep, your fall very rapid; call earnestly to God out of the depth to which you have sunk, pray to him to raise you up, to restore you to the state from which you fell, and not only to keep you from falling, but to assist your ascent to higher eminences hereafter; and may you from your fall derive at least this benefit, that you increase in circumspection, in watchfulness, in humility, in the knowledge of your own weakness, in prayer for, and reliance on, the continual help offered.

Many others, no doubt there are, who cannot undertake to decide, by any comparison of their present state, with that which they recollect of themselves a year ago, whether they have made any proficiency or not. But, my brethren, you can all learn this, whether it has been, and still is, your anxious *desire* to improve in all religious dispositions; whether it has been, and still is, your earnest endeavour; whether it has been, and still is, your constant prayer? You cannot be ignorant of these things; you must know whether it is your principal aim, and the

study of your lives, to advance in all piety and holiness; you must know whether you feel at ease and satisfied with your present condition, or whether you are longing for some spiritual increase, some new grace, or some higher degrees of the Christian temper, already begun within you. You must know, for instance, whether it causes you any pain, and sorrow, and self-reproach, that you have not a more lively perception of the vast importance of the things that concern your salvation; whether you lament over the remaining corruption of your hearts; whether you struggle with your evil inclinations; whether you feel your faith, your zeal, your devotion, your charity, your temperance, your patience, to be defective; or whether you do not trouble yourselves about all these subjects, but are quite contented with the existing state of your affections, without having much considered what that state is. You must know whether you read the Scriptures and hear the word of God with a serious desire to profit by what you read and hear, or with minds that feel no interest in such matters. If you are sensible of none of these earnest longings and endeavours after improvement, none of this grief on account of your deficiencies, then it is certain you are not growing in grace; and not to grow in grace, I am afraid,

is the same as either to decline in grace, or not to be in a state of grace at all. We must go on or go back; if we exercise the Christian dispositions, they will be more and more strengthened like other habits; if we do not exercise them, the contrary dispositions must necessarily prevail, and to produce the one effect, you will have the assistance of God, to produce the other, the assistance of the Devil.

Remember therefore, my brethren, that if you do not settle it with yourselves as a determined thing, that you will, by God's help, always endeavour to "grow in grace," that is, to advance and improve in religion, you will have no religion at all, or what you have, you will soon lose.

Now would it not be a mockery in some of you, to say that you had grown in grace during the year that has so nearly closed? What! the same corrupt unrenewed hearts as ever, and yet grown in grace? The same worldliness, and pride, and vanity, and covetousness, and sensuality, and profaneness, and malice, and yet any attempt at growing in grace, "and in the knowledge of our Lord, and Saviour Jesus Christ!" for so my text concludes. These too are important words, which I am not able to dwell on now, having sufficiently occupied your time in speaking of the necessity of religious advance-

ment in general; you must apply all that has been said to the Christian religion. But let me entreat you to consider for a moment before you depart, and to ponder deeply with yourselves in private, whether you can pretend seriously to have grown at all in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, of Him whose birth we profess to celebrate so joyfully and thankfully? Have you acquired or ever sought any knowledge of Him in any one respect? Have you known Him as your Saviour, and with an humble conviction of your sinfulness, and with faith in Him, implored of God, the benefit of his atoning merits? Have you known Him as your Lord and Master, and diligently obeyed His commands? Have you known Him as your example, and arrived at a conformity with that holy image? Have you known Him as your Intercessor, and approached with boldness and frequency to the throne of grace, feeling comfort and confidence from the thought of having Him as a Mediator there? Now if all these things are "Parables" to you, if you have attended to what has been said, and are conscious that you have not (as will be the case with many) even begun in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, then you have not only lost a year, but the whole of your past lives. It is an

awful reflection! But I must refrain. You who most need to be addressed on such subjects, are quite wearied already; you make light of all serious things, and scoff, most probably, at those who strive to impress them on your minds. Well, time will reveal who is right; it hastens on, while some laugh, and others are grave; we cannot stop it; only a few more such years as we have passed already, or perhaps not one more, and the night will have closed upon us, that night in which no man can work; nothing can be retrieved, it will be decided for ever, one way or the other; take one more thought then, whether it would not be wise to come this very day, to a deliberate and solemn determination, concerning the truth or falsehood of all that is so often preached to you. If you decide it to be false, cast off all shew, form, and pretence of religion; but if you are persuaded it is true, may God give you grace speedily to put on the *reality*; for the time measured out for you may be nearly come to an end. "Yet a little while the light is with you; walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you." The best prayer I can offer you, and with which I shall conclude, is this, may you this day begin, and every day henceforward "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." *Amen.*

# SERMON XIX.

## GROWTH IN GRACE.

2 PETER iii. 18.

***Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.***

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In my former discourse, I dwelt almost exclusively on the first clause of my text, "Grow in grace," and endeavoured to shew you the importance of a continual progress in spiritual improvement, of an unceasing advance towards religious perfection. We may see by our own natural reason, that there can be no resting-place at which a man may stop, and contemplate himself, as being now a finished Christian character. It is absolutely impossible to fix any such boundary to the powers of the mind. It has pleased

God to make the human soul capable of infinite improvement. Any faculty may be improved to any imaginable extent; and who can doubt that this will be made very manifest hereafter, in the case of those happy beings, who shall mingle with the "spirits of just men made perfect" in Heaven? The moral and religious affections and habits, we may be sure, are not excluded from this perfectibility. It is impossible to conceive to what a height of rapture the love of God may be carried in a spiritual state, how intense may be the feelings of gratitude and devotion, how exalted every sentiment of piety, how vast the delight in every thing pure, holy, and lovely, how deep the abhorrence of all that is evil and worthy of aversion. And although we shall even be far from this state of elevation, while oppressed with our present infirmities on earth, yet it is plain that there can be no reason why we should not be making continual approaches towards it; why may we not be ever increasing in the love of God, in charity towards our fellow creatures, in faith, in purity, in holiness, in hatred of sin, in general spirituality of mind! Why may we not be daily more and more refined from all that is evil, occupied in every thing that is good? Who, that aims at Christian excellence, and is at all diligent in the practice of that most

important duty of self-examination, fails to discover such imperfections and deficiencies in his own character, as to afford ample scope for improvement in every Christian disposition and virtue? Nay, the further he advances, the more conscious he is of his failings. A very ignorant man may think himself wise; but he who has attained to much knowledge, has in proportion been ever becoming better acquainted with his own extreme ignorance. So it is also in religion; he who is very backward in all spiritual acquirements, may be satisfied with his condition, and congratulate himself on his proficiency; but he who has made a considerable progress, having obtained a deeper insight into himself, and clear views of the Gospel, bewails his own sinfulness, and longs, and strives, and prays for improvement. A Pharisee's blindness will give birth to the proud boast, "I am not as other men are," but it requires the eminent holiness and piety of a Paul, to say, "I am less than the least of all saints, I am the chief of all sinners." Yes, the more intimate we are with the secrets of our own hearts, the more we have studied our own characters, the more we have compared them with the word of God, the more exalted sentiments we entertain of the Divine perfections, the greater our hatred of sin, the more pure and spiritual our ideas of

the state of blessedness prepared for the redeemed hereafter, the more shall we be convinced, not only of the possibility, but of the neccessity, and the happiness of "growing in grace." At whatever state of our progress we may be arrived, we shall never be contented to stop there, because we shall always see before, a much greater space than that which we have left behind.

We may learn thus much, as I have said, from our own natural reason; for suppose we have attained a certain degree of proficiency in some Christian disposition, is it not natural and reasonable to ask, "why should we stop here?" And when we have proceeded a little further, is not the same question equally appropriate, "why should we stop here?" And what applies to one grace, and one degree of it, applies, without exception or limitation, to every grace, and every degree of each. You cannot put your finger on that point, beyond which there is no improvement; and until you have found and reached such a point, you must take no rest, you must not slacken your speed, but ever obey that divine impulse, which, if you do not resist it, will continually urge you forward.

But is this only the conclusion of human reasoning? Does not the Scripture also say the same? Most plainly, as I proved to you in my

former discourse by some passages, which I will not now repeat; but this I will remind you of, that since the perfect pattern of Christ is proposed to us for our constant imitation, and the most pure, and holy, and spiritual laws of his Gospel are given us as the rules by which our thoughts, our feelings, and our actions are all to be governed, the standard of human excellence is raised much too high for us to entertain any other thought, than that we must ever fall far short of it. Who then shall be satisfied with a lower degree? Or who, in his upward path, shall arrive at that height, above which he will not see another and another eminence, still inviting him to ascend, until he leaves the world behind, and mounts up to the glories of Heaven?

My Brethren, I have been insisting on the *principle* which ought to influence us in our Christian course; I have been maintaining, that we cannot even *imagine* any point at which spiritual improvement ceases, and the Christian character is so complete and perfect, that nothing can be added to it. Come to *practice*, and the truth of the argument will appear plain enough. If we could imagine any such point as I have been speaking of, yet at all events we never can arrive at it. The most eminent and established Christians, are deeply sensible how few and little their attainments are. They feel that they are

ever striving and struggling against great opposition; the flesh weighs them down, earth attracts them, a corrupt nature distresses them, an evil spirit incessantly attacks them, infirmities and temptations, of every kind, and on every side, beset them; with all these enemies and hindrances to contend with, they know and feel the difficulty of "growing in grace," of making any perceptible progress; and still, however anxious have been their desires, however earnest their prayers, however diligent their labours, however great the assistance they have received from heaven, still, to the end of their lives, they condemn themselves for their tardy pace, and see afar off the goal of perfection which they have had in view. If any man entertains a better opinion of his advancement, if he thinks "he has already attained, or is already perfect," he is very deficient in one Christian grace at least; for true humility would be ashamed of such a sentiment. But, "Lord increase our faith, increase our love for Thee, increase our charity to man, increase our affection for heavenly things, our devotion to thy services, our thankfulness for thy mercies, our trust in thy providence and thy grace, our resignation to thy will, carry on and perfect the work which thou hast begun in us;" such is the constant tenor of their humble prayers.

How contrary is this state of the mind to

that of the persons who are so easily satisfied with the degree of religion which they have arrived at, and who are so haunted by that vain fear of going further than is necessary or prudent! What ignorance is displayed in that too prevalent apprehension of being too religious! Truly we are "afraid where no fear is;" we are afraid of that which cannot exist, which is but a phantom of our own imaginations; for it is not possible to be too religious in the true sense of the word. Oh that it were possible to be religious enough, and that we could attain to that sufficiency! But although God will, for Christ's sake, mercifully accept us as believers in Him, with all our imperfections and infirmities, if we sincerely repent of them, and feel their burthen, and desire their removal, (and so we may indeed have sufficient religion for our salvation,) yet no true Christian can ever have sufficient for his own satisfaction, because he must ever fall short of that degree which the Gospel prescribes, and which the man who hungers and thirsts after righteousness continually aspires to.

They who are possessed with the fancy that it is possible to be too religious, can know but little of true religion. Perhaps they have mistaken superstition for it, or enthusiasm, or some injudicious or extravagant mode in which it is

occasionally exhibited. Religion, rightly understood, admits of no excess; it is impossible to be too much devoted to the service of God, too earnestly bent on "making our calling and election sure," too diligent in cultivating all the tempers and habits, of which the Christian temper is composed. God grant that this may be your persuasion, and you will find that there is ample room for growth in grace, to whatever length your lives may be extended, and however anxious you may be to let no day slip by without improvement. But if you aim at little, you will accomplish less; if you desire no more than a moderate degree of religion, and deliberately intend not to pass that point, you will never reach so far, at least, you will never have any religion worth the name of it, any that will lead towards the throne of God, or the salvation of your own souls. Aim at being Saints, or you aim too low. Are you startled at this? Perhaps you have been accustomed to employ this name as a term of reproach, for so indeed it is too often employed, to the great discredit of those, who endeavour to bring a Christian character into contempt. All terms of reproach are disgraceful to those who use them; but if any one was ever more ridiculously ill selected than another, it is that very one of which I am now speaking. An

appellation of higher honour cannot be bestowed on man; and though no one would presume to take it to himself, or to think himself worthy of it, yet every true Christian will say, "Oh that I were a Saint in the estimation of God!" for a Saint is an holy person, and those whom we are accustomed to call Saints by way of eminence, are no other than the Apostles, and the most conspicuous among the early Christians, to be equal to whom is above our highest hopes, but humbly to follow whose steps should be our perpetual desire and endeavour. When Christians lived among Heathens, and when any one who was called a Christian, was considered really to be one, then "Christian" was the term of reproach; but since that name has become universal, and is in many cases, only, as it were, a title applied in compliment or courtesy, and does not really mean that all who bear it are true believers in, and devoted servants of Christ, the reproach attached to it has worn away; those who hate all earnestness in religion, and despise the sincere followers of Christ, must find some new expression to signify the same thing; and thus "Saint" has been an opprobrious name with those, who have no desire for sanctification themselves; for what the Heathens understood by "Christian," is exactly the same as mere nominal Christians, now a days, understand by "Saint."

My Brethren, though the world hate, and revile, and ridicule you, though they "cast out your name as evil," yet I say again, aim at being Saints, or you aim too low. Aim at being such Saints as St. Paul, St. Stephen, St. Peter, St. James, St. John, and all the rest of those great and excellent men, those "burning and shining lights," "the glorious company of the apostles; and the noble army of martyrs." You have the same Gospel, the same faith, the same Lord, the same heaven in view, that they had: though you may indulge no hope of equalling them, there is no reason that you should deliberately propose to be inferior to them; no, make it an object to be as like them as possible, and God grant you the aid of the same spirit, who made them what they were, and so sanctify you in this life, that you may hereafter experience the fulfilment of that prayer, which we offer here every Lord's day, and be "numbered with His saints, in glory everlasting!"

But I must go a step further than this. Aim at being like Christ, or you aim too low; aim at a right understanding and estimation of his character, as the model proposed to believers, and at an increasing conformity to it in your hearts and lives. This is one important sense of the Apostle's exhortation in my text; "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and

Saviour Jesus Christ." That he did not mean by this a mere head-knowledge, a knowledge of the history of Christ, or of his nature, and of the purpose for which he came into this world, nor yet any enthusiastic notions sometimes attached to the expression of "knowing Christ," which can neither be explained or understood, but that he meant, in part at least, such a knowledge as would powerfully affect the heart, and influence the conduct of those who professed it, I do not doubt you will perceive, when you have heard and considered the following passage, wherein he tells us what fruits this knowledge of Christ should produce, "giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity; for if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Any knowledge, or pretence of knowledge, which does not thus display itself, is worth nothing; even the Devils knew Christ in one sense, when they exclaimed, "we know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God;" but in another sense this was no knowledge, for it could avail them nothing; and what

is true of them, applies equally to all who are under their influence; "he that saith I know Him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." Such barren knowledge is the worst ignorance that can be; to know so holy a character and yet to hate it, and be opposed to it, what can condemn a man more? St. Paul shall also inform us what should be the result of our knowing Christ. In writing to the Ephesians, after having described the ignorant, and ungodly, and depraved, state of some Gentiles, he says to his Christian converts, who were among them, and yet as separate from them as light from darkness, "But ye have not so learned Christ, if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus; that ye put off concerning your former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that ye put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness."

In this knowledge of Christ, we are "to grow" continually; how can we ever so know him too well, or even well enough? The more you study His character, the more clearly you will perceive the defects in your own; how deficient you will find yourselves in humility, in

meekness, in charity, in patience, in submission to the will of God, in zeal for his glory, in forgiveness of injuries and reproaches, in the spirit of prayer, in self denial, and renunciation of earthly and carnal affections! How can you be more forcibly and convincingly taught, that you must ever be in a growing and improving state, than by having Him set before you as an example? Daily may you say of many dispositions that you indulge, of many actions that you do, "this is not like Christ." Would Christ have felt this rising of pride? Would Christ have been thus roused to anger? Would Christ have harboured this uncharitable thought? Would Christ have shewn these symptoms of impatience? Would Christ have thus indulged his body? Would Christ have been so lukewarm and indolent in his Father's service? Would Christ have been so languid and weary in prayer? Would Christ have neglected so good an opportunity of promoting the glory of God, and the salvation of man?

When you can persuade yourselves that you are "come unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," that you resemble Him in *all* points, then you may be satisfied that you have gone as far as is necessary, and as far as the spirit of God can carry you; then you may ask

with some confidence, "what lack I yet?" But if you truly aspire to "grow up unto Him in all things," you will have full employment for your whole life, however diligent you may be, to profit by every minute of the precious time which God shall grant you for that purpose.

But the Apostle's words remind us of other respects, in which we must grow in the knowledge of Christ. He says, "in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," therefore we must know Him as our LORD and SAVIOUR. We know Him as our Lord, when we feel and conduct ourselves towards Him as His servants, that is, when we implicitly obey Him; for He himself asks, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" It was mockery to clothe Him with a purple robe, and to put a crown of thorns on His head, and a reed in his hand, and then to bow the knee, and salute Him as a King. And what is it to profess ourselves His servants, and yet in any thing to prefer our own inclinations, or the maxims and fashions of the world to His supreme will? I do not speak now of those who in their lives manifestly deny all knowledge of Him in this character, and who seem to say with bold defiance, "we will not have Him to reign over us; we are they who ought to rule, who is Lord over us?" I address you

as persons who acknowledge His title, and pay some deference to it. Perhaps you yield a hesitating and reluctant obedience to Him, perhaps in some things you object to His commandments as severe and grievous, and refuse to comply with them; perhaps you sometimes say, "this is more than can be required of me, may I not use my own judgment, and take a little liberty in this respect? Can the same strict obedience be demanded of all? May not my weakness, my difficult circumstances, my unavoidable hindrances, procure me a dispensation from the exact fulfilment of all that Christ has enjoined?" or "a neighbour has deeply injured me, he has offered me the highest provocation possible, and that without any offence on my part; but after every civility and kindness, can it be expected that I should forgive him, that I should love him, that I should desire his welfare, that I should show him any favour if it were in my power?"

Or you say "I have so much business on my hands, is it necessary that I should be particular about prayer and reading the Scriptures? I have toiled so hard to gain my money, may I not now apply it to my own indulgence and enjoyment? Must I needs devote so large a portion of it to the relief of others? I might as well not have laboured for it. I am obliged by my situation

in society to mix much with all sorts of people; must I be stiff, and unbending, and offend them by the austerity of my notions and manners! May I not conform to their customs, and at least connive at their sentiments? Must I carry my religion every where? Must I be always a Christian, and never a man of the world?" Of this sort are the reasonings of many, who profess to be the servants of Christ, and in some things are ready to obey Him. But the more you grow in the knowledge of Him as your Lord, the more plainly you will perceive the inconsistency of all such debates, and the spirit of rebellion which they indicate; the more you will be convinced that it is not for servants to discuss the propriety of their Lord's commands, or the necessity of obeying them, but that it is your business only to yield an unhesitating compliance to his will, and whatever progress you may have made in this Christian disposition, you will still find, that it will be the work of your whole lives, to improve in the facility, and cheerfulness, and zeal, and steady perseverance with which you devote yourselves to the service of Christ.

But you must grow also in the knowledge of Christ as your SAVIOUR. You may be inclined to ask, "How does this knowledge admit of degrees? How can it be greater or less? If I do not yet know that my only hope of salvation

is in Christ, then I have not to grow, but to begin in this knowledge; and if I do actually know thus much, then how can I go further? How can my knowledge be increased?" And yet I know no duty, concerning which we have more need to cry continually, "Lord, increase our faith." For after all, though we tell you, according to the Gospel, what your Christian conduct should be, this is the grand and important point, here is the foundation, upon this every thing else depends, all your security, all your happiness, all your exertions as Christians. St. Paul at least laid so much stress upon it, that he says, "I desire *to know* nothing, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." And again, "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of *the knowledge* of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

This great Apostle did not speak unadvisedly or extravagantly; there was solid reason for his feeling, and expressing himself in this way. For being fully assured that it was only through faith in Christ, that he could hope to be saved, he

could not be sufficiently thankful that his eyes had been opened to this truth, and he could not too highly value the knowledge which had been so mercifully imparted to him. It was this that so animated and encouraged him; this was his motive to all holy and godly living; this inspired him with comfort and confidence as to his own salvation, and made him so zealous in promoting the conversion of others. "The love of Christ constrained him;" he felt a force in that motive, which he had never experienced from any other; no other had ever affected or influenced him so powerfully; he had been zealous before, he had desired and endeavoured to serve God according to his power and knowledge; he had believed in the resurrection of the dead, and sought to "work out his salvation" by strict obedience to the law of Moses; but it must have been with fear and trembling indeed, when he thought that all his success depended on his own righteousness. And therefore, when he knew that Christ died to redeem him from sin, when this was so brought home to him, that he had an "assured hope" of his own safety, he was so overjoyed, so filled with gratitude, so actively possessed with the love of God and Christ, that he devoted himself wholly to his Saviour's cause, both by cultivating every Christian virtue in his own

person, and employing all his energy in the promotion of the Gospel. But although the grace of God wrought so deep a conviction, and so speedily, in the heart of this great Apostle, there are many degrees, according to the ordinary operation of the Holy Spirit, before we can arrive at his faith; we may be a very long time growing in the knowledge of Christ as our Saviour, before we shall feel any thing like the influence which it exercised on his mind. How slow our pride is to admit that conviction, of our own sinfulness, (which must precede the true knowledge of Christ,) and our utter inability to justify ourselves before God, and to acquire his favour by our own obedience! Some, who call themselves Christians, disciples of Him who was named JESUS, expressly to signify, that he should "save his people from their sins," will yet never admit this conviction, but will always think too highly of themselves to accept salvation on the terms of so humiliating a confession.

Then again, how our vain, weak reason, which we are for ever setting in array even against that which we acknowledge to be the revelation of God, is staggered at the wonderful method of redemption declared in the Gospel, and asks, again and again, with cold and heartless

infidelity, "How can these things be?" And lastly, how long it is, either through want of feeling an individual interest in the good tidings of the Gospel, or through some remaining love of sin, or through an improper distrust of God's mercy, before these doctrines can be brought to bear with their united force upon our hearts, and we ourselves as sinners be persuaded, joyfully and thankfully to accept Christ as our Saviour! But when once this has, by the long striving of God's Spirit with our most reluctant minds, been brought to pass, then with St. Paul we feel no motive so strong as this knowledge of Christ; we hate the sin which caused his death, and we love Him who died for sin; and the more we grow in the knowledgeof Christ as our Saviour, the greater would be our aversion to every thing offensive to Him, the more ardent our desire to please Him in all holy conversation and godliness.

May it please God of his mercy to implant this faith, though at first but as a grain of mustard seed, in the hearts of all of us! May he nourish it with the dew of His Holy Spirit, and dispose us to cultivate and encourage it, so that it may increase more and more, and every Christian grace grow up with it! May He render it productive of every holy disposition and habit,

so that we may neither be barren, nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Saviour Jesus Christ; to Him, with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, be glory both now and for ever. *Amen.*

# SERMON XX.

## THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD.

HEBREWS iv. 13.

***Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.***

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THE universal presence of God is one of those fundamental doctrines, on which the fabric of religion rests; take it away, and the building cannot stand. For by religion is meant the relation in which man stands towards God, with all the duties that arise out of that relation, such as dependance on God, prayer in all its branches, the regulation of the heart, and ordering of the whole life, with regard to the will of God, and the studying His approbation in all things; all these things necessarily imply a belief in the

presence of God. We should have no encouragement, no motive, so to live, to lay down such a rule and principle in the government of ourselves, were we not persuaded of our being always under the observance of the divine all-seeing eye. The very life of religion, I may almost say, consists in an abiding sense of the presence of God; the more fully we realize it, the more constantly we meditate upon it, the more cautious and circumspect shall we be in all our conduct, the more strict in devoting ourselves both soul and body to His service, and the more anxious to avoid whatever may be displeasing in His sight; whereas, on the other hand, the less deeply or the less frequently we reflect on our being under His inspection, the more inconsiderate and careless shall we naturally be in all religious matters, the less restraint shall we place upon our inclinations, the more freely shall we seek our own pleasure and worldly interest in all things.

He who is perpetually thinking of God, as a Being who is "about his path, and about his bed, and spieth out all his ways," who "knoweth altogether every word that is in his tongue," and understandeth his thoughts even before his mind has conceived them, can hardly be so presumptuous and daring a sinner, as with deliberate

wilfulness to defy Him, even to his face. It seems impossible but that he would live under a constant feeling of reverence and awe towards the Divine Being, whom he is ever beholding with the eye of faith. Such a one would not willingly do any thing to offend a powerful individual of the same frail nature with himself. How then could he venture to draw down upon himself, by wilful sin, the displeasure of that omnipresent God, from whose loving kindness alone, he can hope for any good thing, conscious, as he is, that "all things are naked and opened to His eyes?" No, the sinner must forget God, or endeavour to think, that God forgets *him*, to feel even a momentary security and satisfaction in the transgression of His laws; he must encourage himself in wickedness, by saying that no one shall see him; he says in his heart, "there is no God," or "tush, thou God carest not for it;" and as far as his own thoughts are able to banish Him from existence, he lives "without God in the world."

Seeing then that the consideration of God's presence is so effectual a help to religion, or rather so indispensable and essential a part of it, and that the profane forgetfulness of that truth, opens wide the door to all ungodliness of living, I do not know that I can address you on a subject that may more profitably engage your attention.

In my present discourse, I shall show you the uses to which the knowledge of this important truth may be applied; and may He, "to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid," so direct "the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit," that our contemplations, on this present occasion, may be blessed to our lasting benefit, and that we may henceforth dedicate ourselves wholly to Him, "in whom we live, and move, and have our being," through Jesus Christ our Lord.

I do not think it necessary to commence now, in the way in which it is sometimes requisite to do, by proving that the doctrine in question, is contained in the Holy Scriptures, because none of you need information on that head; you know how often it is directly expressed, how universally it is implied throughout the whole Bible; you know it is always understood in every word that is said on the subject of prayer, since prayer would be unavailing without an Omnipresent God; and whatever is written concerning the dealings of providence, the importance of piety and holiness, the danger of irreligion and sin, of necessity proceeds on the assumption, that "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do;" every

attempt at religion would be folly, if God did not see or regard us.

But there are two sorts of persons, of very different characters indeed, and who upon very different grounds make objections to this great truth, to whom it may be useful to address a few words; the same answer will serve for both, although it is meant by way of comfort to the one, and of rebuke to the other. The one is fearful and dejected, and, though desiring nothing more earnestly than to be an object of God's favour and paternal care, yet can hardly persuade himself that the great Creator of the world will stoop to behold so insignificant a being as himself; he is oppressed by the thought which seems once to have made the mind of David uneasy;—"When I behold the heavens, the work of thy hand, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him?" This thought disheartens him; he fears he is overlooked and disregarded, and that God will never condescend to interest Himself about *him*, or his trifling concerns. The other, with very opposite feelings, comes to the same conclusion; he wishes to be out of the sight of God, because he knows, that if beheld, he must be "an offence" to Him, and therefore he

easily satisfies himself that it is beneath the dignity and majesty of the Most High, to care what such a little creature as *he* is, may be about; he may therefore go on securely in sin, for God is engaged in affairs of so vast an extent, as to remove any fear that He has leisure to observe him; it is no matter what he does, "God turneth away His face, and He will never see it."

I might reply to both from the Scriptures, but as both the fears of the one, and the hopes of the other, must proceed from want of faith, let us hear in a few words what mere human reason herself has to say upon the subject, even without the assistance of revelation; and, my Brethren, I hope you will not think that herein I am improperly departing from that only rule by which I ought to measure the truth or falsehood of any religious opinion, the word of God. The argument would be simple and easy in this and many other cases, if I might always take it for granted that all my hearers fully allowed the authority of that word; but how many are there, who, notwithstanding their profession of faith, are actual unbelievers! And how often is it necessary, even before a Christian congregation, to confirm, by other arguments, the truth of doctrines, which they ought to receive simply because revealed in the Scriptures; and it is to be hoped, that some-

times men are thus brought to perceive the reasonableness of revelation.

The answer then which on the present occasion I make to those, who, from whatever cause, whether from despondency, and an abject opinion of themselves, or from love of sin, are inclined to think that God does not regard them, on account of their insignificance, is this; First, that this feeling or opinion actually tends to Atheism, to the denial of God's existence. For where *is* God? In what point of space, in what part of creation, can He be present, which is not utterly insignificant, compared with his immensity? He is not present with you, you say, because you are so unimportant; then not with your nearest neighbour, for the same reason; nor with the next, and so you may go on, until you have banished Him from the visible world. And if this globe is not important enough to attract His attention, or to be honoured with His presence, why should the next Planet, (equally with our own, but a mere speck in Creation) be more worthy of His superintendance? Why the next to that, and the next? Thus you may proceed from one globe to another, applying your argument of insignificance to every part of every one, and thus expel God altogether from the universe. Therefore, if He is absent any where,

He is present no where; and consequently if you are shocked at the thought of maintaining an argument, which would leave the world without God, you have no choice but the wiser conclusion, that if He is any where, He is every where, present with *you*, as well as with what you may consider the grandest and most important part of creation, whatever it be.

In the second place, consider that whatever God condescended to Create, you have every reason to suppose He will not think it unbecoming His dignity to uphold and superintend. He has created this earth, and all its inhabitants, and created it and them for some wise purpose; why should He desert them? Why fling them from his hand, and leave them to shift for themselves?

But thirdly, you cannot imagine that either yourselves, or any thing in the world, could subsist without His constant care. We can behold the operation of second causes, and we sometimes are so blind and foolish, as to rest in them, forgetful of the one great cause of all, by whom those means are employed. But try to explain any natural proofs, "produce your strong reasons," go back through a succession of courses as far as you can trace them; you do not know why any of these causes acts as it does, except

that it is God's will and appointment; and you must at last arrive at a point, where your reasonings stop; you are lost; you can proceed no further; and so it must be if you knew all the inferior causes; you must at last come to God. God then is every where, and engaged in every thing that is going on throughout His creation, and you are not excluded from His presence, nor beyond the range of His attention.

The last observation which I shall offer on this subject, is this; that whereas you suppose that you are exalting God by thinking it beneath Him to notice such insignificant beings, you are doing the very contrary, you are entertaining a mean opinion of His greatness; for you imagine either that He is not present any where, or unable, without trouble, to superintend all the parts of His creation. *I* have a much higher notion of the power and knowledge of God. I believe that while He is directing the greatest operations of this world, He is also busily engaged in keeping the minutest parts of it in order; that if no globe, no system of globes, escapes His notice, no more does the smallest insect, which our sight is not acute enough to perceive; that if a world could not fall into ruins but by His will, neither can a sparrow fall to the ground without his permission; that He not

only supports angels and archangels in existence, but provides food for the fowls of the air; that while He adorns with light and glory, the sun, and moon, and all the shining host of heaven, he clothes with the most beautiful robes of various hue, the very "grass of the field, which to day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven;" that while He telleth all the stars, and calleth all by their names, He knoweth also the number of the hairs on each man's head. Is not the greatness of God more exalted by this opinion of Him, than by yours, who think that some things are too insignificant for him to attend to? Fancy not then that you honour God by conceiving that you are out of his presence, or beneath His watchful care; you degrade Him; you take away from His infinite perfection; you reduce Him to be the governor of only a part of the world, and thrust Him (as far as by your reasonings you are able) out of the throne of His universal dominion.

But let us have done with these arguments; they may have suggested a few hints, calculated to allay the gloomy fears of some, and to undermine the presumptuous hope of others; and if they are likely to be useful to any one, in either respect, I have not unprofitably employed them. But most of you have no thought of calling in

question this great truth of God's omnipresence; you require chiefly to be *reminded* of it, to be persuaded to contemplate it, to consider the practical consequences that should result from it, to be prevailed on to *live* as in the sight of God.

"To live as if in the sight of God!" Oh! what a difference would this make in the life of every man, who now lives "without God in the world!" Yes, and if it were more diligently studied and practised in the life of even the best and most perfect Christians, of those who most constantly "walk with God!" How sin would be scared or shamed out of the world, if we could always set before us the presence of that holy Being, who hateth all iniquity, and has proclaimed eternal war against it! The Psalmist says of the "beasts of the forest," that "when the sun ariseth, they get them away to their dens;" so would all sinful thoughts and imaginations fly away from the face of God, if the pure light of heavenly truth shone upon our hearts, and with the eye of faith we beheld those heavenly beams always encompassing us; not those sins only, which are practised in broad and open day, which, though they carry a bold front in the sight of men, "would vanish before the presence of God;" but those hidden sins also of secresy and of darkness, which men encourage

themselves to commit, because they think that no eye can penetrate the thick veil, under which they try to conceal their wickedness; nay, and even the unclean brood of evil thoughts, which infest the heart, would shun the exposure of their deformity before the pure rays of essential holiness. What a new world should we live in! It would be the "new heavens, and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." The Saints in heaven will never sin, nor desire to sin, because they will behold God face to face, and admire His perfect excellence. And we should even now resemble those blessed Saints in innocence, if we could always see Him in His power and majesty before us, and observe His eye turned upon us in every direction. But no man hath seen God at any time; "we walk by faith, and not by sight," and that eye, though it watches over us by day and night, though it pierces through our very frames, and reads the secrets that are written in our hearts, though there is no time nor place, in which we can escape from its observation, is concealed from us; and unless by constant meditation we keep it in our view, we shall soon forget that it beholds us at all; and if once we think that we are out of the sight of God, we are in the power of the devil, to be led captive by him at his will.

My Brethren, if you are desirous to walk

always as in the sight of God, it is your part, by this habitual contemplation of the divine presence, to "set God always before you;" to seek for Him, and "feel after Him;" to use all the means possible to remove those clouds and obstacles which conceal Him from your view; particularly to pray that your thoughts may not be engrossed with the things of sense, that your hearts may be purified to behold spiritual things, that you may be enabled to cast off the love of all those objects, which, being rivals of God, would dispose you to hate his presence. It is a great progress indeed in religion, to have arrived so far as to have a perpetual and abiding sense of God's being ever with you; how few have been so happy as to reach it! All forget God at times; some never remember Him. I will not say any thing about these latter, who "live without God in the world," but let me shew you, as an illustration of what I mean, a few instances in which even they who are considered to be sincere Christian professors, manifestly prove that the presence of God is a fact which often escapes their minds.

When with zest and secret gratification, (a feeling which you can hardly conceal from your company, though you would wish to appear

grieved at the story you have to relate,) you are telling something to the discredit of your neighbour, magnifying his faults, detracting from his better qualities and actions, practising any of the thousand arts of malicious slander, do you not at that moment forget that God heareth you! Would not that thought silence at once the tongue of calumny, and close the lips that were opened to revile? Would you not then see, as if they were written in clear characters on the wall, the words "speak not evil one of another, Brethren?" and "with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged?"

Or when you are about to indulge in some witty remark, at the expense of a serious and sacred subject, or to raise a laugh by some impure narration, which would shock the ears of any person of modesty and delicacy, could you see the eye of God turned upon you, would you not be confounded, and abhor yourself for your abominable intention, and "pray God that the thought of your heart might be forgiven you!"

Or when you are eating and drinking to excess, though you be not actually surfeited or intoxicated, yet more like a "beast that hath no understanding," than like a man, who should guide his appetite by reason, or a Christian man,

who should mortify his fleshly lusts, would you so revel in sensual pleasures, if you seriously contemplated the presence of God, who requires you to keep under your body, and to bring it into subjection? Would not this intemperate feasting, which now you think to be permitted, appear to you a gross and hateful sin?

Or when you are dealing out your goods to your customers, and giving an untrue account of their value and their quality, and the price you paid for them, or weighing them in the false balance, or meting them with "the scant measure that is abominable," or by any other arts taking advantage of your neighbour's ignorance, to over-reach and impose upon him, what would be your consternation, if at that very moment, you should be inspired with a lively sense of God's presence, and behold him observing all your dishonest contrivances, and all your false representations!

Or when you put on any outward show of religion, which contradicts the real state of your heart, when you come here for instance, and go through all the form of worshipping God, and hearing his word, if God could suddenly be represented to your mind as witnessing all your gestures and attitudes, seeing you bow your knees without one thought of prayer, hearing you

use the most humble expressions of repentance, without the least conviction of sin, declaring aloud your faith in Christ, and singing psalms and hymns of praise, without one corresponding sentiment in your heart, would you not be alarmed and disgusted at the mockery of which you had been guilty, and expect immediately to have your portion appointed with the hypocrites?

Or when again you are afraid to confess your real sentiments before men, concealing them from fear of ridicule or inconvenient consequences, complying with the ways of the world, contrary to your conscience, out of regard to human opinion, if God were then to remove the film from your eyes, and cause you to see Him as he had all the while been seeing you, would you not be ashamed of your base fears, and recal to mind the words of Christ, "whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven?"

These are a few of the cases, in which it is plain that men would act very differently, if they thought of the all-seeing eye, and the all-hearing ear of God. How important then that you should always endeavour to realize his presence, and to set him before you!

I cannot give you more weighty advice than that you should make this a continual study, an

exercise of habitual meditation, the subject of constant prayer. As for prayer indeed, there is no such thing, unless you place yourself by faith in the immediate presence of God. You cannot pray to Him unless you think that He beholds you; you may use a form of words, (and alas! this is prayer with most men,) you may even feel wants and entertain desires to have them supplied, but you do not pray to God, unless you believe that He knows what you address to Him; "without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Indeed, as I have said, you cannot actually address God in prayer, without a consideration of his presence with you; and therefore the advice is good that you always allow yourselves a little space before you commence your petitions, for the contemplation of this subject, that so you may present God before your mind, and endeavour to behold him stedfastly by an inward and spiritual perception, while you make your supplication. Men of ignorant and gross minds, feeling this need of some present object to which to address themselves, set up images at the first, (as is always the apology,) that their thoughts might be led from the image to the Being whom it represented; but

this practice you well know, whether the original intention was good or bad, has always ended in idolatry.

It may be difficult to acquire a vivid perception of the presence of an invisible God; it requires much thought and reflection, and I would not have you think that it is a light work to pray, or an exercise of no mental exertion. It calls for the best powers of the mind, and is truly worthy of them, for it is the highest and most honoured employment in which the mind can be engaged. But let me suggest one thing to you, which may perhaps afford some little assistance in this difficult work, to those to whom the thought has never occurred. People in general, when they pray, are apt to think of God as a great way off, in some undefined, unimaginable place, they know not where; I think they must lose much of the comfort of prayer in consequence. You should consider God as in the same place, in the same room, with you, nay as nearer still, in your very heart. Perhaps indeed, the best way is to combine both these ideas of God, to consider him in heaven the seat of his glory, as our Saviour directs us in the commence- of his perfect form of prayer, "Our Father which art in heaven," for the sake of elevating our minds, and placing them in a state of humble

adoration, and at the same time to bring him near to you, as dwelling in your own hearts; God himself gives us authority for regarding Him in this two fold character, in Isaiah lvii. 15, "Thus saith the High and Holy one, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humle spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." While a reverence and awe will be begotten by looking up to God as enthroned in his glory above the highest heavens, a solemnity, a confidence, a happiness, will be diffused over your mind by this conviction of his immediate presence; and this is no extravagant or enthusiastic thought, as you have seen from the passage which I have already quoted; it is also an express promise of Christ, "if any man love me, my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Our bodies are in the Holy Scriptures called "the temples of God," "the temples of the Holy Ghost;" so that we may always enjoy the closest communion with God. And hereby let me in conclusion remind you, we may in our examination ascertain whether we are truly sensible of, and value this high blessing of God's presence. Do we constantly address ourselves to him, not

neglecting prayer till we come into church, or till we enter into our closet, as if we went thither to seek Him, but holding intercourse with Him frequently, wherever we are, and however employed? Do we naturally and readily refer ourselves to Him, as to a friend always at hand, in all our undertakings, our anxieties, our temptations, difficulties, and emergencies of every sort as they arise in our daily life? By this we may certainly know whether we consider God as about our bed and about our path. They who have only set times and places for prayer, seem to be guilty of a kind of superstition, as if they thought that God could only hear at those times, and in those places; at all events they cannot feel that continual need of him, and dependance upon him, which they ought sensibly to experience; otherwise they would habitually commune with him under all circumstances, and find it their greatest comfort to breathe continually into his friendly ear, the tale of those wants, which he is so willing and able to relieve.

May we, my Brethren, through the help of the Holy Spirit, daily advance nearer and nearer to perfection, in this happy communion with God, which will be our best safeguard in this world against sin, and the most excellent preparation for our introduction into those blessed

regions where we shall behold him face to face, and enjoy the light of his glorious presence to all eternity! Implant in our hearts this desire, and fulfil it by thy gracious assistance, most merciful Father, for thy dear Son, Jesus Christ's sake.

# SERMON XXI.

## CHRISTIAN HOPE.

PSALM xxxix. 8.

***And now, Lord, what is my hope? Truly my hope is even in Thee.***

SUCH was the wise and happy conclusion, to which David was led by his reflection on the shortness, the uncertainty, and the vanity of human life. Would to God that we may all make similar reflections, with a no less pious feeling, and thus be guided by the Holy Spirit, to adopt the same just and only safe conclusion.

I verily believe there are but few among us, except the very young and inexperienced, who have not occasionally uttered doleful complaints concerning the insecurity and misery of life, and the insignificance and worthlessness of all its

possessions and enjoyments; for there can be but very few, even of those who are not far advanced in years, who have not either suffered, or witnessed among their acquaintance, such sorrows and afflictions as would teach them, if they have hearts to receive instruction, the folly of dependance upon any earthly stay. The unhappy condition of humanity, I do not doubt, has been an universal theme, ever since the time that death and unhappiness were introduced by sin. Among the ancient heathen writers, we find it continually expressed as a proverbial sentiment; and none can declare this opinion more strongly than the holy men of old, whose conviction on this subject is recorded in the Scriptures. "Few and evil" (says the patriarch Jacob,) "have the days of the years of my life been." "Man that is born of a woman" (says Job,) "is of few days and full of trouble, he cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not." And again, "man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." And how deep were the lamentations, and how bitter the complaints of this suffering saint, (who is, notwithstanding, held forth to us as an example of patience,) when, overwhelmed with the weight of his distresses, he seems for a moment to have forgotten his trust in the love and mercy

of God, and to have sinfully repined at the severity of his dispensation! "Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said there is a man child conceived? Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it! Because it shut not up the doors of my mother's womb, nor hid sorrow from my eyes. Why died I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost? For now I should have lien still and been quiet; I should have slept; then I had been at rest; as an untimely birth, I had not been, as infants which never saw light: there the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." Hear how the wise Preacher expresses the very same miserable thoughts: "I praised the dead, which are already dead, more than the living which are yet alive. Yea better is he than both they, which doth not hear, which hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun." And what says the pious and humble and resigned David on the same theme, so fruitful of "lamentation and mourning and woe?" "Behold, Thou hast made my days, as it were, a span long, and mine age is even as nothing in respect of Thee, and verily, every man living is altogether vanity. For man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain, he

heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them."

You must bear in mind, that I have been thus far speaking of life simply as it is in itself, without reference to another; and it is in this light that both Job and Solomon must have viewed it, when they so bitterly declared that it would have been better never to have been born. As Christians we do not so feel, or so express ourselves; we bless God for our existence, even in this unhappy world, because it is the only way of approach to heaven; we are thankful for the temporary troubles, which are appointed to lead us to an eternity of joy; we complain not of the rough journeying through the wilderness, because the prospect of the heavenly Canaan, "the lot of our inheritance," cheers us in all our difficulties. But look upon this world as unconnected with another beyond, take the value of human life by itself, without the addition of any thing better in reversion, without the expectation of that joyful "rest, which remaineth for the people of God," and we must be constrained to say with Solomon, "vanity of vanities! all is vanity!"

In fact, as I have already said, I believe this is a sentiment which all mankind have agreed in, ever since the fall in paradise, ever since sin, and death, and misery, took possession of this

world, which God had designed to be the abode of happy inhabitants. I mean, of course, that all the serious and reflecting among mankind, have thus estimated mere human life, and earthly happiness; there will always be some light and thoughtless beings, to whom it will appear otherwise, (perhaps there may be such here present, who scoff at all that is said on this subject) who sport their little day, like the gay flies in summer, forgetting that their merriment will have an end, and overlooking the multitudes who are toiling and groaning on every side of them; but the universal sentiment of the grave and thoughtful, on taking a survey of human life, apart from every consideration of immortality beyond the grave, (which so entirely alters the whole state of things,) has ever been with David, "verily, every man living is altogether vanity."

But why should I tell you of the opinion of others on the subject? Have you not the same opinion yourselves? Do you not see that this is a vain and miserable life in itself? And would you not rather never have been born, if the grave is to make an end of you altogether? Oh! I know not for what we live, if not for heaven; I know not what life is worth, if it is not to be exchanged for a happy immortality: "if in this

life only we have hope in Christ," (says St. Paul) we, (i. e. we Christians, so persecuted and afflicted,) are of all men most miserable;" and I add, if in this life we have no hope in Christ, no expectation that he will raise us from the grave, to dwell with him for ever in his glorious kingdom, according to his promise, we are of all creatures most miserable. I have little doubt that the afflicted hearts, and the infirm bodies of many now before me, bear a ready testimony to the truth of all that can be said about the sad condition of human life, and the numerous sorrows that flesh is heir to. And those of you, who have not this witness in yourselves, need not look far for evidence. Look about among your neighbours and acquaintances; can you find none, or but a few, under the galling yoke of extreme poverty? None wasted by sickness! None harrassed and tormented by burthensome cares and anxieties? None mourning heavily for the loss of friends and relatives? You will find many sad examples of all these afflictions, within the narrow limits of this very town; and how soon may the happiest and most prosperous among you be added to the number? Are you merry and cheerful? How soon may your laughter be turned into sorrow, and you may be ready with Job to bewail the hour of your birth,

and in the bitterness of vexation and disappointment to call for death! Are you strong and healthy? In how very short a time you may be lying sick on your beds, groaning under your pains, and gasping for life! Are you happy in the society of your friends? How soon may you be dressed in crape for the death of those whom best you love!

Are these mere gloomy imaginations, or are they so rarely realised in actual life, that it would be unwise to let them make any impression upon you? Did you never hear of such things? Did you never see them with your own eyes? Have you not seen them frequently? And may they not be expected at any time, and by any person?

Now, my brethren, do not suppose that I have said any of these things for the sake of making you gloomy and melancholy; I do not wish merely to distress you with bitter reflections and prospects, nor to undermine all the happiness or comfort any of you may find in life, (unless it arises from an evil source,) by convincing you of the vanity of it. God knows how much need most of us have of all the consolation and encouragement that can be administered, to render it more tolerable. It would be a cruel undertaking to endeavour to make men more miserable than

they are, except when they need to be afflicted on account of their sins. On the contrary, I wish to lead you to the antidote to all the miseries and evils of human life; I wish you, after having seemingly reflected how short your time is, how insecure every thing which you enjoy, how totally void the whole world is of any thing in which you might safely trust your happiness, I wish you, looking thus around, and seeing every human and earthly hope fly away before your eyes, to be able to exclaim with David, "And now, Lord, what is my hope? Truly my hope is even in Thee." But this is a point not always suddenly arrived at, as the result of reflection on the misery and vanity of life.

I will suppose for the present that there are none among you so inattentive to the condition of humanity, as to feel confident, either of long life, or of continued happiness, but that you have all advanced so far at least towards a religious frame of mind, as to perceive your want of something better, and more settled, than the world can afford; that you acknowledge that your "days are but as it were a span long;" that "man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain;" and in short, that "verily every man living," however favourable his circumstances, and fair his prospects may appear to

be, "is altogether vanity," because he has nothing, neither health, nor strength, nor riches, nor pleasures, nor comforts, nor friends, nor even life itself, that he can call his own beyond the present moment; and that therefore you are anxious to find some object more worthy of your study and pursuit, which may promise more perfect and more lasting satisfaction to your hopes.

I call this "an advance *towards* a religious frame of mind," because there cannot be the very slightest impression of religion in the heart of that man who is satisfied with the happiness which this world of itself is able to bestow; and I call it no *more* than "an advance," because there may be still wanting every thing in which the life and reality of religion consists. For it is possible to form a very correct judgment concerning the value of earthly enjoyment, and yet to be in such a state as not to be able to indulge in just expectation of any thing better. It is possible to be very much dissatisfied and discontented with the world, and yet not to have the heart and affections set on things above; it is possible to "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world," and yet not to feel a Christian aversion towards them, nor to entertain a Christian love for "the Father." You may be awakened by disappointment so as fully

to perceive how inadequate to the end for such are all the methods of happiness you have hitherto pursued, and yet be quite at a loss what other means to adopt; you may have been prudent enough to forsake your shattered vessel when you found that there was no hope of preserving her from foundering in the storm, and yet be still in as great distress and perplexity, from the want of a compass by which to steer your frail boat into a safe harbour. And so you may be tossed about on the sea of life, with a perfect conviction of your danger, but with no prospect of arriving at the haven of rest. So have I known many, much displeased with life, finding nothing to comfort them in it, and yet not seeking repose in the hope of heaven. Alas! what a sad condition, only to be aware of our unhappiness, without knowing how to remedy it!

But would you attain this knowledge? Surely it is your most earnest desire; it is the summit of your wishes; it is the very thing of which you most sensibly feel your want, and which you most anxiously long to possess. Then I hold up to you the example of David; behold the refuge to which he fled, and say with him "and now, Lord, what is our hope? truly our hope is even in thee." Religion is the only comforter to which I can recommend you; she will

direct your wandering feet into the path of true happiness, which you will search for in vain without her guidance.

But *what* religion? every one can speak of the excellence of religion in general terms; but what religion have I, as a Christian minister, to propose to you, a Christian audience? Oh! not that foolish and fanciful scheme, which so many desire for themselves, having scarcely the least glimpse of truth in their vain and depraved imaginations; not that which consists in the bare expectation of a better state hereafter, unauthorised by any known promise of God, from whom alone such hopes can justly be derived, not that which man's indolence and presumption dispose him so readily to embrace, a religion consisting of unsanctioned wishes for heaven, and in an unfounded reliance on the indiscriminate mercy of God. It is not any such religion as this that I propose to you as a remedy for the evils of life; but it is that blessed religion, the grand consolation of those that mourn and are afflicted, which is actually revealed to us in the Gospel; it is that which has been expressly communicated to us by Him, who "brought life and immortality to light," and informed us on what foundation our hopes are to be built; it is that which HE PREACHED, who said, "Come unto me,

all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and ye shall find rest unto your souls;" "in the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." It is his religion, who achieved the victory over all the host of evils which sin brought into the world, and is now exalted to the right hand of God, where he ever liveth to make intercession for the sinners who fly to him, and to the glory of which he will one day raise even such miserable creatures as we are, if in his strength we also strive to conquer the world and sin. This is the only religion which I have to recommend to those who are looking around for comfort and happiness. You may put up with a very spurious kind, for almost all men entertain some vague hope of eternal life, they are so often driven in their distresses to look for something better out of this world; but what is the ground of this common hope? If it has no foundation, it will but tempt them on to their ruin, by the enchantments of a dangerous delusion, and, instead of being realised, make them ashamed in the end, when the time shall come for examining who they are that have built upon the sand, and who upon the rock.

Upon the rock then build your hope; you are Christians, disciples of Him "who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification;" of

Him, who alone is "the way, the truth, and the life;" of Him, who is the only "door" through which heaven can be entered; of Him, besides whom "there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we may be saved." And how then can you indulge any but the Christian hope? You should advance further than David, and say, "and now, Lord, what is our hope? Truly our hope is even in Thee," through Jesus Christ our Saviour. What other hope is authorised? What other is lawful? What other is not presumptuous? In this you may safely and strongly confide, but in no other; for no other has any sanction beyond your own vain wishes; and arrogant would be the attempt to build a Babel of your own; heaven is not to be scaled by human means, but only by that ladder which God has erected for your safety. Can you think that such a way has been appointed for the salvation of man, and that man may "neglect this great salvation," and still be saved in some other way? saved without repentance, without faith in Christ, without the holiness so strictly enjoined in the gospel? Saved, then how, my brethren;—through the mere uncovenanted mercy of God, without exercising faith in any atonement made to his justice? There is no authority for the hope. Or saved by your

own merits? But fancy yourself at the bar of divine justice, and consider *what* merits you could plead. Cast back a glance upon your past lives, and see whether they will be able to bear the scrutiny of an all-righteous and holy God. Nay, can your own partial and corrupt *consciences* acquit you? Do not you yourselves perceive an overwhelming mass of evidence, accusing and condemning you? Do you not see in the rear a long series of years, that you would gladly wipe out of your remembrance? Are you not conscious of a burthen upon your souls, that you would sacrifice any thing to be able to remove! Do you not see numberless sins committed, and sins meditated, duties neglected, time wasted, talents misemployed, opportunities of good thrown away? You may see all these things if you will open your eyes. And can you venture to set against these, the small balance of virtuous conduct, which you may think remains? Would not the comparison expose you to scorn and ridicule? And can you think the few good qualities, or good actions, on which you reflect with too much satisfaction, enough, not only to countervail your enormous guilt, but even to deserve an eternity of happiness besides? If you were to see at this moment the heavens opened, and the Son of Man descending in His glory, and

all the holy angels with Him, "to judge the world in righteousness," how speedily would all your confidence in your own merits vanish away! How you would tremble at the consciousness of your sins, and anxiously wish that there were some way to escape from the vengeance, which you would then acknowledge that you had amply deserved! How you would cast away your bold thought of appealing to justice, and humbly cry for mercy and forgiveness! Yes, "the lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day."

"Of that day and that hour, knoweth no man;" but come it will, and when it does, your feelings will be such as I have described; for such are the feelings of most men, who have not hardened and stupified themselves by sin and neglect of religion, when they are laid upon the bed of death; they derive but little comfort from the thought of their deserts, when they come to look upon judgment as an approaching event, and they gladly desire to lay hold of the offer of pardon only; this is the convicted and awakened sinner's cry,

"Mercy, good Lord, mercy I ask,
This is the total sum;
For mercy Lord is all my suit;
O let Thy mercy come."

"And now Lord, what is my hope? Truly my hope is even in Thee," through Jesus Christ my Saviour.

But, my brethren, suffer not this sentiment to be the mere produce of a death-bed; you will want it for your comfort and encouragement then; it is the most unfavourable time that can be selected for the first planting of it in your hearts. It is a lamentable error to put off the sowing of the seed till that season when you should rather be reaping the harvest. The hour of death is not the best time to learn, but to derive consolation from what you have learnt long before. It is not the best opportunity for the first thoughts of religion, but for putting your faith to the actual proof, and experiencing its power, and receiving its aid. Hope should have flourished long before you arrive at that period, when you would reach forth your hand to gather its richest fruits. Unwise is he who says he will not study the art of sailing, till his vessel is in danger of running on the rocks. See therefore, (may God grant you the grace needful for this purpose) that your hope be well settled and established, before "the rain descend, and the floods come, and the winds blow," for it will be difficult to lay your foundation even on the rock, if the stream beat vehemently at the very commencement of the work.

and remember that it is of the Christian hope only that I now speak, and have all along spoken, know of no other; I know of no method of justification in the sight of God, of no grounds upon which you may expect the blessed rest of heaven hereafter, but only the merits and mediation of our gracious Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

If this be the foundation of your hope, happy are ye; though the sorrows of life may crowd around you, "your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." To you are addressed the words of St. Paul, "you that were some time alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath Christ reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy, and unblameable, and unreprovable in "his sight," (as we are presented holy, and unblameable, and unreprovable in God's sight,) "if you continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye have heard."

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost!"

# SERMON XXII.

## CHARITY.

1 COR. xiii. 1, 2, 3.

*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal;*

*And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing;*

*And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*

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WHEN you shall have considered well how lovely in itself, how conducive to the temporal happiness and welfare of mankind, and how necessary to salvation is the virtue, the cultivation of which St. Paul is here so powerfully enforcing,

nay, what is still more, how worthless are all other religious qualifications whatsoever, where this is wanting, you will allow that the words of the text have the highest claim to our attention.

But, in strict propriety of speech, it is not correct to call charity *a* virtue; for it is rather *all* virtue; that is to say, it is the *principle*, the root, the foundation of every virtue; it connects and binds them all together in such a way, that they cannot be separated. If you have true Christian charity, it is not that you are endowed with one particular good quality out of many, but that you have all those combined, that are necessary for the proper fulfilment of all the duties which the gospel requires of you; as members of society, you are just, honest, temperate, chaste, forgiving, gentle, kind in word as well as deed, of strict integrity in all the various occupations of life, and ready to do your fellow creatures all the kind services in your power.

This is not my argument, but St. Paul's; "he that loveth another, hath fulfilled the law; for this, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to

his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfiling of the law." Or take the reverse method, and enumerate all the different vices that disturb the peace and happiness of the world, and see if they can be consistent with this Christian grace. Can the proud man be possessed of it? No, for charity "vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up." Can the quarrelsome and passionate? No; for charity "is not easily provoked." Can the envious? No; for charity "envieth not." Can the selfish? No; for charity "seeketh not her own." Can the malicious? No; for charity "rejoiceth not in iniquity." Can the intemperate and debauched? No; for charity "doth not behave itself unseemly." Can the revengeful? No; for charity "suffereth long." Can the morose and ill-tempered? No; for charity "is kind." Can the calumnious slanderer? No; for charity so far from *speaking* evil, endeavours not even to *think* it. Can the suspicious? No; for charity "hopeth all things;" that is, hopeth the best in all cases. Can the fretful and impatient? No; for charity endureth all things." So that the charitable man, as I said before, and as you now perceive, is a person not merely endued with one good quality, but possessed of every virtue, and free from every wilful vice.

It is not wonderful, therefore, that St. Paul

has spoken so highly of this virtue, or rather, of this bond of all the virtues, as he has done in these emphatic words, which I have taken for my text. It is no wonder that he has assigned it a rank and importance above many spiritual gifts, above the divinely-imparted power of speaking unknown tongues, above prophecy, above a miracle-working faith, above the profoundest learning and the clearest insight into the mysteries of God, above the most profuse liberality to the poor, nay, even above such a zeal for the gospel, as would not be overcome by the pains of martyrdom.

This language is not overstrained; it is not the mere earnest expression of that great apostle's warm feelings and impetuous temper and mind, for it is capable of being justified to the letter by our blessed Saviour's own language, on the same subject. For on what does he say "hang all the law and the prophets?" In other words, what (according to our heavenly instructor himself) is the *whole* of practical religion? Piety towards God, and charity towards man. What is the new commandment that is so peculiar in his doctrine? That we should "love one another as he hath loved us." By what test are we to be especially marked out as his followers! "By this shall all men know that ye are my dis-

ciples, if ye have love one towards another." What is to be the great rule of our conduct towards our fellow-creatures? "Whatever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do unto them." Upon what account shall we be altogether excluded from the hope of pardon for our sins? If we "from our hearts forgive not every man his brother their trespasses." What is to be the proof of our loving Christ? That we "keep his commandments." And what *are* these commandments? Read the Gospel through, and you will find they most impressively enforce the duty of love, and good-will, and beneficence to our neighbours. Who is in danger of the judgment? "Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause."

In the next place, what are the good actions which, done for Christ's sake, and acceptable through His merits, will be enumerated at the day of judgment as claims to life eternal? Deeds of mercy and active benevolence. And what will call forth that dreadful sentence, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels?" The omission of those same offices of brotherly kindness. And will any, nay even the highest privileges and qualifications which men shall profess to have enjoyed through faith in Christ, make up for

him the worthlessness, and vanity, and insignificance of all these great pretensions, than by saying to him,—" still, if thou hast not the love for thy fellow creatures which the gospel requires, notwithstanding all thy boasted privileges, and qualifications, and good works, thou art nothing?"

Neither can you fairly ask me what charity *is;* for its principal features are very minutely specified in that valuable chapter which has furnished me with my present subject; and I have already shewn you, that it comprises every social virtue, and that it is at enmity with every vice and evil passion, that are the causes of all the discord and variance which exist among men; who, if they were sincere Christians, would live together as members of one great family, in love, and kindness, and brotherly affection;—each studious of the other's good—each contributing all in his power to the general happiness of an harmonious community;—all endeavouring to prove themselves the children of one good and merciful Father—the united brethren of a most compassionate Saviour—" the fitly joined and compacted " workmanship of one Holy Spirit, whose fruits are " love, joy, and peace, long-suffering, gentleness and meekness."

Let me only desire you to impress upon your

minds, and to keep always in view, those golden maxims of our Saviour, which I have already quoted; "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;" and "whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do unto them." As long as you make these the rule of your actions, you will never be at a loss to know in what charity consists; as long as you act upon them, you will never fail of proving yourselves to be the disciples of Christ, by the very test by which he has himself declared that every man's character in that respect shall be ascertained. I can say nothing more decisive, nothing more intelligible, nothing more unequivocal on this subject.

I shall therefore rather proceed to notice one or two instances of the sad neglect of this great duty; for that it *is* sadly neglected I may, as a minister of the Gospel, who is bound to point out to men the errors of which he perceives them to be guilty, assert without fear that I shall myself incur the charge of uncharitableness in so doing.

And first, I say that the very common habit of evil speaking and slandering, and making reflections upon our neighbours' characters, in our ordinary conversations, is a most palpable breach of the law of charity. I believe I may

spare myself the trouble of endeavouring to convince you that it *is*, as I have said, a *common habit;* for I doubt not that every individual of you knows it to be so, and any man can mention instances in which he himself has suffered by it. I scarcely know a vice more frequently condemned by all writers and preachers of Christian morals in every age. The prevalence of it is strongly expressed in an extract which I will take the liberty of repeating to you from a book written nearly two centuries ago. "The world hath a tongue as malicious as false, whether in reviling the present, or in backbiting the absent; what have our tongues to move in but this round of detraction? Bar this practice, there would be silence at our board, silence at our fireside, silence in the tavern, silence in the way, silence in the shop, in the mill, in the market, every where; yea, every gossip would have nothing to whisper. What a wild licentiousness are we grown to in this kind; every man's mouth is open to the calumny, to the censure of his neighbours; neither is it cared how true the word be, but how sharp."

This is severe, but if the same remarks had been made in the present day, would there be less substantial truth in them, than there was two

hundred years ago? Are we improved since those times? Are we less addicted to the same evil customs? Is our common conversation more remarkable for a charitable forbearance from such improper subjects? Would there not even now be comparative silence in almost every company, if we refrained from descanting on the faults, and failings, and imperfections of our neighbours? Determine for yourselves; you can confute me by your own experience if I have overstated the fact; but if what I have said is true, let me persuade you that the practice is very contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, a flagrant violation of that prime virtue, Christian love. Oh! how little do they know of the Gospel, and how little of themselves, who are continually employed in prying into and reporting the faults of others! For what says the Scripture? "Speak not evil one of another, brethren." What! not when spoken evil of ourselves? No, not even then; on the contrary, "render not railing for railing." Nay, more than this, "bless them that curse you." Who gave this commandment? He who exactly fulfilled it in his own person; He who "when he was accused by false witnesses, answered not a word;" He who "when he was reviled, reviled not again;" He who when he was mocked and derided in his

agony on the cross, not only forbore from censuring such cruel malice, but even prayed for its forgiveness, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Will *he* then profess himself a disciple of the Gospel, who acts in direct contradiction, not merely to its spirit and tendency, but to its most positive commands? Or will *he* pretend that he has any of that self-knowledge, which is so necessary to sinful man, who is addicted to this baneful and unchristian habit? Does that man see the beam that is in his own eye, who so readily detects the mote that is in his brother's eye? Is *he* conscious of the rents and holes in his own tattered garment of virtue, who so critically discovers the raggedness of his acquaintance? Does *he* perceive the imperfection of his own most ordinary thoughts, and words, and deeds, who is perpetually reflecting on his neighbour's follies? Is *he* aware of his own accumulated sins, who thinks himself authorized to cast stones at his fellow sinners? Well may we say to every such person, "Who art thou that judgest? for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself." "But judge not," my brethren, "that ye be not judged," by Him, who if He were "extreme to mark what is done amiss," would have an alarming account to reckon with us all, and who is of such "pure

eyes," that he could not patiently endure to "behold the iniquity," of his rebellious creatures, if he did not set against it, in our favour, the innocence, and merit, and unsinning obedience of the spotless victim who was sacrificed as an atonement for our guilt. I know not any thing that I could select as a more certain characteristic of a sincere Christian, than a great aversion to believe, and a still greater to propagate, evil reports of other people; such a one will always be charitably disposed to put a favourable construction upon the very worst appearances, instead of finding fault and passing judgment, even when there seems to be no room for allowance.

In dismissing this subject, I would beg to recommend to your particular attention these four maxims, as strong arguments for abstaining from the sinful habit that I have been endeavouring to expose. In the first place, no man is qualified to judge another, in the generality of cases; because he cannot possibly know all the circumstances of the action which he condemns; viz:—whether it has been correctly represented to him, what were the temptations to it, what allowance ought to be made for natural dispositions, for education, or for infirmity.

Secondly,—a charitable opinion, even should

it be false, is much better than an uncharitable one, however just. Thirdly,—God alone is the proper judge of every man's conduct; "to his own master he standeth or falleth." And Lastly, if God were to judge us with the same severity with which men usually judge one another, we could none of us escape the extremity of his anger. Therefore, "be kindly-affectioned one to another," not rashly condemning, but "forgiving one another, even as God of his infinite mercy, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you."

There is another very important particular, in which the law of Christian charity is too often transgressed, on which I had intended to remark at some length, but which, having already tried your patience so long, I shall content myself with very briefly touching on—I mean the condemning one another for differences of opinions upon religious subjects. Now this fault is more inconsistent with the professed character of those who are guilty of it, than the one which I have just before endeavoured to correct. For while, on the one hand, such persons would appear to have a great regard for the Gospel, by vehemently censuring others for the errors which they suppose them to hold, on the other, they prove that they have themselves overlooked one of its most essential and distinguishing doctrines,

by the want of charity which they exhibit towards those who differ from them. My brethren, angry disputes about doctrines are the worst of all disputes; severe judgments, passed on those who do not agree with us in the interpretation of certain passages of scripture, are the most uncharitable of all judgments. If we have reason to think a man *sincere* in his belief, however dissimilar some part of his creed may be from our own, he has every title to our respect and esteem; and however decided we may be that our own opinions are true, we are bound to give him credit for an equal desire to hold the truth, and for an equally strong conviction that his own opinions are orthodox. It is a want of that very religion, on the side of which they raise such a clamour, that induces men to brawl and squabble about points of faith, as they did in the infancy of the church, when they cried, "I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ;" even truth itself is not established by such contentions; for it either falls to the ground in the confusion, while each man strives to thrust his neighbour from its support, or it is torn in pieces, while every one readily grasps at it as exclusively his own. These quarrels have been as serious an obstacle to the advancement of true religion, as the evil passions and depraved nature of man.

Read the history of the church, and examine the state of Christianity in the present day, and you will find that disputes about heresies and false doctrines have been the bane of charity, the worst enemies of genuine and practical piety. What an egregious mistake and absurdity, that Christians should ever have virulently persecuted one another, dragged one another even to death, for difference of opinion! thereby sinning against God and his laws infinitely more than if they had been guilty of the grossest errors in the interpretation of his word! They "knew not what spirit they were of." Assuredly it was not the mild, and gentle, and conciliating, and affectionate spirit of the Gospel of our merciful Lord, who "came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them!" May it please Almighty God never to suffer the church to be again rent and torn by so unnatural a civil war among her own members! But more than this, may it please Him to root out the evils of hostility and warfare that still exist in their bosoms! for the same spirit is still at work among us, though it breathes not forth in such horrid disorders; it is the very same spirit that produces those feelings of animosity which men so often entertain against their Christian brethren, who happen to be of a contrary persuasion from themselves. You say it is im-

portant that we should hold the truth. Granted; but it is much more important that you should preserve charity. A man may be quite firm in maintaining his own opinions, yet perfectly free from ill will towards his opponents; otherwise his religion is vain, and profiteth nothing. Error with charity, is better than truth with malice.

Now I would rather be conformable to the Gospel doctrine of brotherly love and kindness, than to any other doctrine it contains, with the sacrifice of the former, for two good reasons; first, because I may have misunderstood the Scriptures on some other points, but I am *sure* I have not on the subject of Charity, nor is there one individual out of the multitudinous denominations of Christians, who would differ from me in opinion upon that head; and secondly, because, though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, "and though I am ready to give my body to be burned," in testimony of my sincerity, and yet have not charity, "I am nothing," I am no true Christian, I have no just hope of salvation. God only knows what errors are pardonable; he only knows what is absolutely true, unmixed with falsehood; we are all ignorant in many things; we have all prejudices, imbibed from education, which it is hopeless to remove; we now "see

through a glass darkly;" we are but children in knowledge, we "know but in part, when that which is perfect is come, then we shall know, even as we are known;" when the veil shall be removed from our eyes, which now throws a shade of obscurity over perhaps the plainest truths, and doubtless we shall all find that we were before in many things erroneous, and misinformed.

But "now remaineth Faith," to guide us in our passage through the mazes and perplexities of this confused and intricate world, "Hope," to cheer and comfort us on our journey, with the prospect of a clearer day beyond the grave, and "Charity," to smooth the way, by cultivating kindness and friendship with the various companions of our pilgrimage; "but the greatest of these is Charity;" because, without it, Faith and Hope are worthless; for in that case, Faith will never attain a sight of the glories of heaven, and Hope will end in utter despair; but Charity will survive and increase to all eternity, being extended to the whole company of Saints and Angels in heaven, wrought up into the most intimate union with God the Father who loved us, God the Son who redeemed us, and God the Holy Ghost, who first poured into our hearts that most excellent gift, the very bond of peace, and of all virtue.

# SERMON XXIII.

## REGENERATION.

2 COR. v. 17.

***If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature;—old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new.***

THE sole end of preaching is, that men may be saved, that they may become on earth meet to be partakers of the happiness of heaven hereafter. This is the ultimate object at which we aim; we can have no other view or desire, if we are sincere in the exercise of our holy and most important functions. But although this is the acknowledged *end*, it behoves us also to speak of the *means*, which God has appointed to conduce to that end. And more than this, it is our duty earnestly and continually to exhort men to the

diligent use of those means, through which the grace of God is ordinarily communicated. We are not merely to inform them in general terms, that they are to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, but to remind them also of the various and particular channels, through which that blessed gift is most commonly imparted. I trust, my brethren, that you who have been in the habit of frequenting this "house of prayer," will not accuse me of having kept back that most essential doctrine of the gospel, which teaches us, that in the generality of cases, (you will hear presently what I mean by thus qualifying the assertion,) no man can be a real Christian, without a thorough conversion of heart, and of life too, as a necessary consequence; and that this conversion is the effect of a spiritual operation upon his soul, renewing him to the likeness and image of God.

I confess that I have hitherto been designedly cautious in the use of *one* expression to denote that change, because it is made a common handle for dispute and controversy, and I wish, as much as possible, to remove all grounds of religious contention, which serves only to irritate, without instructing or improving. The term to which I allude, is Regeneration; and no word has been more unfortunate in giving occasion to that bane of all true piety, party spirit. There

are endless disputes about what it means, and when the effect signified by it takes place. Does it in the Scriptures mean conversion? and if so, does it in that sense take place necessarily at baptism, or at some other uncertain period? You know that our blessed Saviour has said, "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God;"—that St. Paul speaks of the "washing of regeneration;"—that our church in her Offices, also connects regeneration with the ceremony of baptism. Some of you may know also, that the most antient Christian writers very commonly use the term "regeneration," or "the sacrament of regeneration," when they mean baptism. It is plain therefore, to me, that regeneration, in *some* sense, takes place at baptism; and I do not hesitate to affirm, that, in the sense of conversion, it *never* takes place on that occasion. For people are baptized, either as adults, when their reason is ripe, and they are able to distinguish between right and wrong, truth and error, or as infants, when they have no knowledge, no powers of mind whatever. Now, in the former case, when persons of maturer years are baptized, their conversion must take place *before* baptism; otherwise they are not qualified to be baptized at all; for repentance and faith are absolutely necessary in those who

are capable of repenting and believing, to render them worthy partakers of this sacrament. Therefore, if they are properly said to be regenerated at baptism, regeneration in *their* case, means something more than conversion; for *this* must have preceded. And again, in the case of infants, it is plain that a child, of a few days old, cannot, with any propriety, be said to be converted, when it is incapable of thought, or reflection, or knowledge of any kind; therefore, infants are not in *this* sense regenerated at their baptism. But is it meant, that through the influence of the Holy Spirit upon their souls, their natural corruption, their inherent *disposition* to sin, is removed? This cannot with any certainty be asserted; because, if you were to compare a number of persons who had been baptized in their childhood, with an equal number of persons who had not been *so* admitted into the Christian church, you might not find a less propensity to evil in the one than in the other. If, therefore, regeneration is in any sense to be restricted to baptism, and takes place *only* at that period, (and it is my sincere opinion, that the scriptural use of the term is so limited) it is not in the sense of *conversion* that it is to be understood. What I should understand by the term so applied, is, that the baptized person is taken out of the

world, and admitted into covenant with God, into the "fellowship of Christ's religion;" that he thereby becomes a member of the invisible church, an inheritor of the privileges of the gospel; that his original guilt, which exposed him to the wrath of God, is forgiven for the sake of Christ, by the seal of whose holy ordinance he is separated to the kingdom of heaven upon earth; but not that he will necessarily be a spiritual "child of God," or eventually be admitted to the kingdom of heaven hereafter: for alas! we too well know by experience, how many professed Christians forfeit the privileges offered to them, and live and die with no better hopes of salvation, than if they had altogether rejected the name of Christ, and the possesion of his religion. Their mere baptism will not save them; if they are saved, they must be converted *after* baptism.

That which I have now declared, therefore, is the only sense in which I can understand regeneration, or the new birth, to be connected with the outward ceremony of baptism; viz.—that the person baptized is thus admitted into the new covenant with God, and by Christ's ordinance made an inheritor of the privileges and promises of the gospel. In the other sense, as implying an actual and thorough conversion of heart and life, which makes the man a sincere

Christian, I believe that in those who are rightly baptized in their riper years, it takes place *before* baptism—in those who were baptized in their infancy, afterwards; and I doubt not that those, whose sincere desire it is to preach the uncorrupt truth of God's holy word, are generally misunderstood, when they are supposed to hold any other opinion on this subject, than such as I have now expressed. We are cautious, perhaps, in the use of the term "regeneration," because, being used by different persons in different senses, it is unhappily too often made the Shibboleth, the watch-word of a party on either side; but we believe as effectual and striking a change to be necessary, before the natural man can become a genuine Christian, as they do, who think that this disputed word is the only one by which that change is properly expressed; and we attribute the work to the operation of the Holy Spirit, with the same assurance of *His* being the author of it as they themselves feel. Why then these endless, and unprofitable, and hurtful disputes, about a word, when we are agreed as to the thing? Why may I not use the terms conversion, or renovation, or any other of similar import, without being charged with "stopping short of the great end of preaching," when I mean the same thing as they do, who prefer the word regeneration,

though I avoid the use of an expression, which, from mutual misunderstanding, so often gives rise to uncharitable suspicions, and unfounded censures?

But do I indeed mean the same thing? I do mean the very same, and no other. You shall judge for yourselves after I have stated to you what I mean by conversion, how far I suppose it to be necessary, and by what agent to be accomplished.

By conversion I mean the same as our blessed Saviour did, when he said, "except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of God." I mean the same as St. Peter did, when he said, "Repent ye and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." I mean the same as St. Paul did, when he said, "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds." I mean the same change as the apostle signifies, when he asserts, that "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." I mean, that whereas "the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither can be," they on the contrary "who are Christ's, have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts." I mean the same state to which those had come, of whom St. Paul, after having enumerated a long list of "unrighteous" persons,

who should "not inherit the kingdom of God," says, "and such *were* some of you, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God." In short, I understand the true Christian convert to be one who has "put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and has put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." This, my brethren, is what I mean by conversion; and this is as great and important a change, as any other person intends to describe, by whatever word he may prefer to express it. The change is radical, and total, reaching the very bottom of the heart, and from thence spreading through the whole spirit, soul and body of the man. No two men can differ more from each other, than does the same man from himself, in his unconverted and converted state. See him before conversion, selfish, proud, uncharitable, impure, worldly, thoughtless of God, of his own soul, and of eternity, unconscious of guilt, fearless of judgment, unambitious of heaven. But behold the same man, when he becomes a converted Christian; you would not recognise him, except by his personal exterior. In every other respect he is a new man, new in the inclinations of his heart, new in the whole tenor of

his conduct. His desires and aversions have interchanged their objects; he avoids what he before pursued, and pursues what he before avoided. His pride is turned into humility, his selfishness into universal charity, his love of the world into the love of God; his levity into seriousness, his indifference to sin, into hearty repentance, and a holy dread of offending, his thoughtlessness about salvation, into an extreme concern for the eternal welfare of his soul, his unbelief into firm faith, his neglect of God into continual prayer and communion with him, his affection for things on the earth, into contempt for all the vanities of this short life, and an earnest endeavour after the endless and substantial happiness of heaven. This is a brief outline of the character of the man who has become a sincere convert to Christianity; and such must be the character of us all, if we would entertain a reasonable hope of salvation. So much then for the meaning of conversion.

I will state now, how far I suppose this great change to be necessary, that is, *to whom.*

I am not disposed to deny what has been asserted by others, that there may be some, who having been from their earliest childhood, piously brought up, by religious parents, having imbibed spiritual instruction, cherished Christian feelings

and principles, and Christian habits, with the very first rudiments of knowledge, and having always persevered in the same dispositions and practices, have, by reason of God's blessing on their education, no need of that entire and universal change, of which I have already spoken. But how few are there of this sort! how great the majority of those to whom, in some later period of life, it is absolutely necessary that they should be awakened from an utter indifference to religion, and be brought to see, for the first time, the value of their souls, the danger of sin, their natural corruption, ignorance, and weakness, the nothingness of the world, the immense importance of the fearful alternative of heaven and hell hereafter, the exceeding riches of God's mercy in the redemption by Jesus Christ!

How much the larger proportion of men live, for many of the best years of their life, perfect strangers to all religious impressions; wholly devoted to earthly pleasure or business; careless of the concerns of futurity; devoid of all interest about their salvation; without repentance, without holiness, without faith, "without hope," in fact, "without God in the world!" To these, the great bulk of professed Christians, conversion must be preached; by these it must be experienced, or they cannot enter into the kingdom of

God. It is to no purpose to say that they have been regenerated in baptism; that they are called by the name of Christians; that they are members of the Christian church; that they have partaken of the ordinances of religion; or to make similar vain pretences; this may be the "form of godliness," but it is not the power of it; and they have as much need of conversion, as if they had never heard the gospel preached, or known of its existence; for what resemblance is there to sincere Christianity, in a mere name, or a mere form?

Is it not a profanation of that holy religion, to make it consist in such empty and unmeaning externals? Consider with yourselves, my brethren, did Christ come into the world for so very unimportant a purpose as merely to give us a name? or did He die for so unholy a purpose, as to permit us to continue in our natural corruption and sinful habits? Did He not come to make us his disciples and servants, to rescue us from the *power* of the world, the flesh and the devil? "to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purchase us unto himself as a peculiar people," separate from the unbelieving and godly world? to give us a new spiritual life, new dispositions, new characters, new principles of action, new motives, all in accordance with the new objects which He has proposed to our view? Are not, in his dispen-

sation, " old things passed away, and all things become new ? " Is it not altogether a new thing to the natural man, that he should " walk by faith and not by sight ?" that he should wean himself, as much as possible, from every strong affection for things present and visible, and seek first, and above all, that which is future and invisible ? Is it not new to him, that he should " love, with all his heart, and soul, and strength," that God of whom, by nature, he knows and desires to know nothing ; nay, whose presence is even hateful to him, in his sinful state ? Is it not new, that he should overcome his selfish feelings, and in the full and free extent of Christian charity, "love his neighbour as himself? " Is it not new, that he should so offend his native pride, as to look upon himself as vile and unworthy ; a sinful, weak, and ignorant being ; incapable of being received into the favour of God, but through the merits of a Saviour ; unable to live in purity and holiness, without divine assistance ? Is it not new, that he should labour to fulfil all the duties required of him, and yet, however successful, consider himself, after all, but an " unprofitable servant ?" that he should study to acquire the spiritual perfection of the Christian character, and yet, however high his advances, be content with the name and estimation of a pardoned sinner ?

If all this is new to the natural man (and surely, nothing can be more contrary to the notions and feelings which we do by nature entertain,) then every man who *is* in his original carnal state, has need to be thoroughly converted; to become a "new creature," utterly unlike his former self. And to whom does this apply? merely to the unbaptized, to atheists, to unbelievers, to the professors of false religions, to the openly profligate and abandoned? Nay, my brethren, but to all professed Christians equally, at some periods of their lives, with the possible exception of those very few, whom I have supposed to be Christians from their earliest infancy.

Be not offended at this assertion, as if it were "a hard saying;" nor say of me, "doth he not speak parables?" but consider with yourselves, whether he who becomes an established Christian, does not thereby experience a great and momentous change of heart and life. The change may be slow and gradual, and long before it is quite accomplished; yet is it not most striking and evident, and worthy of the name of a new creation? Are not those, who *have* experienced it, sensible of the vast alteration which has taken place within them? and do not these two classes comprise almost all, if not every individual, of the nominally Christian world? This,

then, is the extent in which I believe conversion to be necessary; allowing the possibility of a rare exception here and there. I doubt not that it is necessary to all the rest, even to baptized and professed Christians, as much as to mere heathens and unbelievers.

It remains now only to state, by what agent this great change is to be effected. Enquire of the unconverted man, and whatever he may think or answer, he will unquestionably find by experience, that he is utterly inadequate to the work by his own strength. He cannot renew himself unto holiness; his sins have taken such hold upon him, that his own struggles, however violent, will never prevail to shake them off. The purity of the gospel is so perfect, that his sinful heart can never of itself be truly disposed to acquire it. He may entertain wishes, and form resolutions, and they may seem at first to bear some promise of success; but if he depends on himself, they will be invariably disappointed, and come to nothing.

This is the certain result of the ineffectual strivings of unassisted man. Beset with temptations, and naturally so sinful and feeble, exposed in the midst of his enemies, and having a treacherous and deceitful heart within, he fights against fearful odds, and soon learns his pre-

sumption by his failure. Enquire of the Scriptures, which lay open the nature and character of man more clearly than he perceives them himself, and they declare the same truth. "Without me," saith Christ, "ye can do nothing." "It is God," saith St. Paul, "that worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure." It is through the Spirit that we must "mortify the deeds of the body;" it is the Spirit that "convinces the world of sin," that "helpeth our infirmities," that produces, as its fruits, all the graces and virtues of the Christian character; it is for the gift of the Holy Spirit that our Saviour particularly commands us to pray, knowing that "we are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but that our sufficiency is of God." I need not multiply quotations; you will find throughout the New Testament scarcely any subject of prayer ever mentioned, except the influence of the Holy Spirit. We are to "pray continually, and without ceasing." For what then? For spiritual gifts, for conversion, for repentance, for faith, for strength, for holiness, for the love of God, for pure affections, for obedient wills, for all the support that our hearts so greatly need to subdue our evil inclinations, to resist the temptations of the world around us, and to conform our whole souls to the holy image

of the Son of God. If we are Christians, it is "by the grace of God that we are what we are;" if we are not, it is by the same grace alone that we can become so; and this very thing should be the object of our constant prayers, and industrious study. This is the great end of my preaching and of your hearing; and if at any time I seem to stop short of it, it is only in order to exhort you to a diligent use of the means whereby that end may be obtained.

May we all frequently and fervently pray for this divine teaching, that so among the discordant opinions of the world, we may be guarded against any important error, and having, by God's help, "come to the knowledge of the truth," may we ever be enabled to hold it, not in unrighteousness, nor in vain strife and contention, but in purity of heart, holiness of life, and meekness of spirit, displaying its power in all godliness and charity, through the merits and satisfaction of him, who is truth itself, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

# SERMON XXIV.

## THE LORD'S SUPPER.

1 COR. xi. 28.

*Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.*

I CANNOT but venture to hope, that the address which was read to you on Sunday last, has induced you all, in the course of the week which has since elapsed, to bestow some thoughts on the subject of that solemn ordinance of our religion, which is to be this day celebrated—the holy sacrament of the Lord's Supper. These thoughts have, doubtless (as is usual with a multitude) led you to very opposite conclusions. Some of you have resolved that you will participate in that sacred feast—but many more, I fear, have determined that you will not do so.

I wish, therefore, to address a few remarks to both classes separately, and I shall begin with those who do *not* intend to accept the invitation to the Lord's table.

Now I earnestly beseech all of you, who have made this determination, to consider seriously with yourselves, upon what ground, and for what reason you have made it. I will enumerate some of the excuses, which I know are wont to be offered, in order to assist the consciences of those who may possibly be inclined to give themselves credit for better motives than really actuate them, or to think that the motives, which do actuate them, are justifiable.

One man says, "I see not the sinfulness of the omission, if I do neglect the Lord's Supper; it is only a formal ceremony, which I do not believe to be so very important as some people declare it to be. There is no natural obligation on me to observe it, as there is to obey the moral precepts of the gospel. I can perceive that I ought to be charitable, and just, and undefiled in conduct. There is something in the very nature of these virtues which shews that they are necessary parts of a good life; but why it should be necessary to go to the Lord's table, or why it is reckoned highly sinful to neglect it, I profess I do not understand."

If there are any among you, my brethren, who reason in this way, allow me to say that such persons reason very incorrectly. Had the sacrament of the Lord's Supper been a mere human device, then indeed it would have been allowable for every one to exercise his own judgment, as to the necessity or propriety of observing it; but this is not the case.—It was instituted by our blessed Saviour himself, and He left a command that it should be constantly observed by his disciples, in remembrance of Him. What can we reply to this? Shall we venture to question the wisdom or utility of that which has been appointed by divine authority? Shall we be so bold as to say, that we see no advantage in honouring, or no crime in despising, an ordinance of Christ himself? It is very true, that there is no *natural* obligation to this duty; but are Christians to take for their rule of life nothing but their own natural sense of what is right or wrong? Are we to make laws for ourselves, or to obey those which we find in the gospel? The true principle of religious conduct consists in doing what is good, because God has commanded it, and in abstaining from evil, because God has forbidden it. It is not because we, by our own reason, judge this and that to be right or wrong, that we are to do the one and avoid the other, but because God

hath declared that it is right or wrong; because He hath said, that He will have this done, and will not have that done. So that there is the very same obligation to obey *all* the commandments; for he who breaks one, sets at defiance the authority by which all are imposed; and remember, that He who said, and who had full authority to say, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments," was the same who also said, concerning the Lord's Supper, "Do this in remembrance of me."

This should be a sufficient answer to those who abstain from the Lord's Supper, because they do not see the importance of the duty. It is important, because it is enjoined by Him, whose command about any action must immediately attach an essential and vital importance to that action.

But suppose it *were* a mere human ordinance, instituted by pious Christians, for the sake of keeping up the remembrance of our Saviour's death, but founded on no divine authority, and therefore not of any necessary obligation; suppose, I say, it were on this account optional with Christians to observe or to neglect it, according to their opinions of its propriety, yet as long as it was in no respect *contrary* to the Scriptures of truth, do you not think religious men would be

glad to partake of it? Do you not think they would willingly adopt any method, by which they might be enabled to keep up their piety, and to rekindle, from time to time, the flame of religion within their hearts? And do you suppose they would think it necessary to have a divine injunction, to *oblige* them to communicate in a solemn memorial of the great event, to which they owe their salvation? The gospel, it is well known, no where commands us to observe Christmas Day, or Good Friday, or indeed to set apart any other day, but the Sabbath, for the public worship of God. It is merely in compliance with human institutions, that we pay respect to these great festivals and fasts; there is no divine authority for them, yet as there is neither any divine authority against them, you find that Christians are very happy to take advantage of these opportunities of assembling together, to commemorate, by religious services, the important periods and circumstances of our blessed Saviour's history. Truly religious men do not wait for a command before they will engage in religious exercises; they are *fond* of them, and when it does not interfere with the necessary business of life, they will willingly keep more days holy than those which God has appointed to be hallowed.

Now then, apply these remarks to the Lord's Supper. Suppose (as I have said) that it was instituted by man; do you not imagine that, provided they saw nothing in the ceremony at *variance* with the gospel, true Christians would rejoice to celebrate, in any rational and pious way, the death of their Redeemer? It is customary to celebrate the memory of many of the great and public benefactors of mankind; men do this out of reverence and respect for their character, and out of gratitude for the good they have done to their species; and do you think that Christians would not of themselves have found out some way of commemorating the death of Him, who opened to all the world the gate of everlasting life, even if He himself had not appointed any method? I think they most probably would. I hope there is no fear but that his sincere disciples would have been at least as forward to join in that commemoration of Him, as men are to perpetuate the memory of those who have merely conferred temporal benefits on the human race.

Even in this view of the matter, then, what shall we say to the objection that the Lord's Supper is only a ceremony, and therefore of no very material importance? I fear it does not proceed from a pious heart; for it is a ceremony ordained partly in honour of the great founder of

our religion; and on that account alone, would have great claim to the respect of Christians, even if it had been instituted by man.

But you know that it was *not* instituted by man—that it was ordained by Christ himself—and that the appointment of it was accompanied by a positive command, "This do, in remembrance of me." So that if any man should ask, "What sin is there in neglecting the Lord's Supper?" I answer, it is a sin, in as much as you thereby disobey a command of Christ. Is that no sin?—surely you cannot think any injunction of His to be unimportant.

Do you ask why our Lord instituted such an ordinance?—What is the use of it? Suppose I were to say, I do not know, would that alter the matter? would that remove the command from the gospel, or make it of none effect? If we knew nothing more, it surely ought to be enough that we know it to be commanded. But we are not at a loss to discover why it was instituted; it was because Christ intended it to be of great spiritual advantage to his church—because he meant it to be an instrument, in his own hands, for conferring his especial grace upon all worthy communicants—and because he foresaw it would tend to the strengthening and refreshing of the souls of multitudes of his true disciples. Our

blessed Saviour did not appoint it in vain, you may be well assured. He did not appoint it either as an amusement, or as a burthen, or as a snare, but as an effectual means of grace and salvation; and such it is found to be by those who celebrate it with holy minds, and spiritual feelings and affections.

Another man says, "I have never partaken of the Holy Sacrament, and therefore I will not do it now." This is the way in which people often encourage themselves in the neglect of their duties, by pleading that they have always neglected them; as if they had acquired a sort of right to disobey the commandments of God; and as if it were in religion, as in worldly affairs, that a man could establish a privilege to be exempt from certain obligations, by referring to the length of time that he had disregarded them. But is not that very circumstance of their neglect of this holy rite hitherto, one of the heaviest charges against them, and one of the strongest arguments for their partaking of it at the first opportunity? Is it reasonable, that a man should derive encouragement to continue in sin, by reflecting how long he has lived in that state? Is he not, on the contrary, the more bound, as soon as he sees his condition, to endeavour, with all his might, to escape from it? It is a stupid and

senseless thing, in all matters, to delay, because we have delayed already; in religion it is also wicked, and dangerous in the extreme. In worldly concerns, will any man say, I ought to have done such and such a thing, a long time ago, therefore I will not do it yet? and does such a reason better excuse the neglect of a religious duty? If any one, therefore, here present has said, "I have never received the Holy Sacrament, and therefore I will not receive it now," let him alter his resolution and expression, and say, "therefore I *will* receive it now; this is the only rational determination to which the consciousness of his delay should lead him.

Another says, "I am not *fit* to partake of the Lord's Supper." Perhaps not; but let us see what the meaning of this is. Let him who says that he is thus unfit, consider well what it is that he means. What is it that he is "unfit" to do? Is he unfit to repent of his sins—to make resolutions of amendment—to express a lively faith in Christ—to remember his death with thankfulness, and to be in charity with all the world? This is what *they* are called upon to do, who would partake worthily of the Lord's Supper, and no man can say, with truth, that he is *unfit* to do these things; if he *will* not do them, he should change the term, and acknowledge (not

that he is unfit) but that he is *unwilling* to do them. The expression of "unfitness" is incorrect; it seems to imply that something accidental and unavoidable keeps him away from the sacred feast, whereas it is his own voluntary determination that does it. If he is resolved not to repent, and commence a new mode of life, then let him by no means profane the Holy Sacrament by partaking of it; but if he desires, and intends, and prays to God to enable him to do these things, he is very "fit" to come, and will, I have no doubt, be blessed in the performance of so sacred a duty. Take this also into your serious consideration, that he who is not fit to attend the Lord's Supper, is unfit to die; and is it not a fearful thing to remain in such a state, when we know not but that we may die this very day?

Another says, he is fearful of falling into sin afterwards, and thereby aggravating his guilt. Consider, I pray you, whether this is not one of the delusions of the deceitful heart; and whether he who makes such an excuse, does not really mean, not that he is seriously afraid he may fall into sin, but that he does not in truth intend to strive much against it. It is very true, that the best resolutions may be broken, and this too when they have been solemnly confirmed at the Lord's table; but still we ought to make them,

and to do our best, by God's help, to keep them; and this will be a much better security for a holy life, than not making them at all.

It is easy to see through a man's real meaning, when he says he means to neglect this duty, lest he should fall into sin afterwards; he means that he will continue in his former course, and that he does not choose to make any resolutions to the contrary, because he knows that he shall not be bound by them.

He who honestly and sincerely resolves upon a reformation of his life, hopes and prays, that, under divine aid, he may be enabled to do what he has resolved; but he who will not resolve on a good life, lest he should break his resolution, has no sincere wish to lead one; for the resolution itself is the first step, and how shall that man ever accomplish a journey who will not even commence it! Let no man therefore deceive himself by imagining that it is a conscientious scruple, which induces him to abstain from the Sacrament, lest he should not afterwards live up to the professions which he would on that occasion make; it is a mere delusion, a mere pretence of principle, where there is none in reality; at least, it is such principle as *he* possesses, who will not resolve against thievery, or drunkenness, because he is determined to be a

thief or a drunkard; and who, I ask, thinks better of such a man for not making the resolution? Yet as I said before, if any man is *resolved* not to amend his life, if he is convinced that, were he to receive the Sacrament, he should only make false and idle professions, professions which he has no thought of putting into practice, let him not profane that holy ordinance, only let him not be so blind to the true state of his heart, as to flatter himself, that it is in any respect a good or creditable motive, which keeps him away, for the motive is no other than a determination to live in sin; and he himself shall be the judge whether there is much value in such a motive.

The last excuse that I shall notice, and that very briefly, is the want of time. It is difficult to say, how such an excuse as this ought to be dealt with; for it is impossible that it should be made by any, who have religion really at heart; and those, who have not, should not be persuaded to partake of the Lord's Supper, until they have. But indeed it is to the want of sincere religion, that all these excuses are to be traced, and it has been my object throughout, to make men perceive, that this is the *true* cause of their reluctance, by convincing them that they would not make such empty excuses, were not that great

defect at the bottom. Let us therefore, with the same view, see what pretence there is for the plea of want of time.

What then is that great and urgent affair, which so engages a man, (and that on the sabbath day,) that he has not an hour to spare for the most solemn ordinance of the Christian religion? Does not this simple question completely expose the falsehood of the excuse, particularly when it is considered how very rarely, (perhaps indeed too rarely,) the opportunity is offered? It is but six times in the whole year that it is customary for the Holy Sacrament to be administered; and will any man, who pretends even to the name of a Christian, say, "it is not *convenient* for me, and I have not *leisure* to partake of it?" I shall not venture any suppositions as to what these weighty occupations may be, which interfere with the performance of a very necessary duty of religion, but leaves every man, who imagines himself to be so hindered, to compare the importance of that which he intends to do, with the importance of that which he intends to neglect; and if he, in his conscience, believes that he has more serious matters to attend to than the commemmoration of the death of his blessed Saviour, in an ordinance of his own appointment, let him be satisfied with the excuse; but if he cannot seri-

ously persuade himself of this, let him honestly confess that the want of religion, and not the want of time, is his hindrance.

Should any who were previously disposed to excuse themselves upon any of the pretences that have now been exposed, think better of it, and be desirous of participating in the Sacrament, let thom not fear that they will be unworthy communicants, if they bring with them true sincerity. I would have none attend the feast, to avoid the mere shame of going away; for they will be but "dissemblers with God;" but I would advise all those to stay, though they should not at first have intended it, who do sincerely repent of their sins, and seriously desire and resolve to lead a new life from henceforth. Some preparation for so solemn a ceremony were certainly desirable; yet I cannot but think that they (if any such there should be) who have now been convinced that their intention of not communicating was wrong, had better attend the holy table, with such preparation as the time, and the nature of the case will allow, than neglect it through the fear that they are not sufficiently prepared.

You will not, I trust, mistake me. I do not say, come to the Holy Sacrament, at all events, whatever may be your habits, and state of mind. On the contrary; I say, go away, by all means

if you are not qualified, nor have any *desire* to be so; go away, if you do not repent; go away, if you have no faith in Christ; go away, if you bear hatred and malice against any of your neighbours; go away, if you are living in indifference and sin, without any purposes of amendment; but take this consideration along with you, that you must, before you die, be reformed in all these particulars, or you will never go to heaven. You cannot go to heaven without repentance,—for "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish;" nor without faith in Christ,—for "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;" nor without charity, nor without holiness,—for "without holiness, no man can see the Lord;" so that the same condition which makes you unfit to appear at the Lord's table, excludes you equally from the hope of salvation.

Supppose you were on your death bed, in daily and hourly expectation of passing into the world of spirits, and were still unworthy to partake of the holy Sacrament; do you think you could die happily, or with a cheering prospect before you? I know not with what reason you could consider yourselves fit to enter into another world, if you consider yourselves unfit to participate in the Lord's Supper in this; I know not with what face you could appear before the judgment seat

of Christ, if you are living in such a state as not to be able to present yourselves at His table upon earth. You are not on your death beds it is true; but you know not how soon you may be; and you may be nearer your end than many who seem to be on the very brink of the grave; for when summoned out of the world by God, you will not then be able to say, as you do when invited to the Lord's Supper, "I pray thee have me excused." You will not then be able to answer, "I have such and such an hindrance, therefore I cannot come." No! my brethren, when God calls you into His presence, you must obey immediately. I ask again then, suppose He should call you at a time when you were unfit to receive the sacrament; would He not call you at a time when you would be also unfit to *die*? Think of this seriously, you who intend now to retire from the church, as unworthy to communicate in the body and blood of Christ. Consider what it is that you have at stake; it is not merely whether you should be fit to unite with your fellow Christians in celebrating the death of your Redeemer, but whether you shall be qualified to hope for eternal life. Let the Holy Communion be a secondary consideration; seek first to obtain the wedding garment, which shall enable you to enter into the kingdom of

heaven, and when you have that, I have no doubt but you will be among the foremost to present yourselves at the Lord's table.

Having hitherto addressed myself, almost exclusively, to those who are in the habit of neglecting the sacred ordinance of the Lord's Supper, allow me to add, in conclusion, a few words of admonition and advice to those of you, who habitually present yourselves at this holy feast, and who propose to accept the invitation which has this day been made to you. I shall not detain you long, but I intreat you to give your serious attention to what I am about to say.

I have often heard those who abstain from this solemn ordinance of our religion, give it as one reason for their so doing, that they see some observe it, who do not appear to be at all the more careful in their lives on account of it; who shew no particular signs of reformation, and do not seem in their ordinary conduct to be at all more religious, than the world in general. I do not agree that this is a reasonable objection; because the insincerity of others, is no cause why *we* should not be sincere; and this same argument would prevent a man from doing any thing good, because the same thing was often done by hypocrites; at this rate no one ought to join even in the public worship of God, because some

do so, who have no piety in their hearts, and are not at all the better for it; but, nevertheless, I grieve that the remark should be founded on truth; and I do earnestly beseech those of you, who are in the habit of partaking of the Lord's body, to beware how you become "a stumbling-block to those that are weak;" for when ye so sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Consider therefore seriously "what manner of persons ye ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness."

You know who the persons are that are invited to the Lord's table. The minister addresses them in these words:—"Ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways, draw near with faith, and take this Holy Sacrament to your comfort." So that you, who upon that invitation walk up to the Lord's table, in so doing, declare before God, and in the face of the congregation, that the description applies to yourselves. You are therefore, by your own solemn and public profession, sincerely penitent—in charity with all the world—and resolved, by the grace of God, to amend

your lives. You then immediately proceed to make a most humble confession of your sinfulness; you pray earnestly to God to forgive you for Christ's sake, and to enable you ever after to serve and please Him in newness of life, to the honour and glory of His holy name. Again, *before* communicating you express your utter unworthiness in the sight of God, and your entire dependance on his mercy—and you beseech Him that He will grant you so to eat the flesh of His dear Son, Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that your sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and your souls washed through his most precious blood, and that you may evermore dwell in him, and he in you. And *after* you have partaken of the bread and wine, you, in the following words, dedicate yourselves to the service of God. "Here we offer and present unto Thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls, and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto Thee."

Now it is shocking to think of all this being with any person, only so much solemn mockery of God and religion. What! will any man use these very serious and significant words, without any corresponding feeling or emotion whatever? Will any man make these most humble confessions of sinfulness before God, who trusts in

himself that he is righteous? Will any man in such earnest expressions implore forgiveness, who is yet living in wilful sin? Will any man so solemnly declare himself to be in perfect charity with all men, whose heart is full of malice, pride, and envy? Will any man thus publicly profess his faith in Christ, and his thankfulness for the redemption purchased with his blood, who lives like an unbeliever? Will any man at the very table of the Lord, proclaim his hearty repentance, and his stedfast resolution to lead a new life, who, in reality, has never seriously resolved on amending his ways? Can it possibly be so, my brethren, that any man receives the holy sacrament one day, and the very next, perhaps runs wilfully and deliberately into sin? Can it be so, that any of you will be seen at the Lord's table one day, and the next be seen drunk, or be heard to swear, or to talk profanely, or obscenely, or to do any thing that you know to be forbidden by the laws of God? Will you immediately after, injure or defraud your neighbour, or give yourselves up carelessly and indifferently to be led astray by every temptation that may assail you? God forbid! may the divine grace keep us all from such fearful sin! That, through the infirmity of our nature, we shall frequently offend both in thought, word, and deed, even after pa

taking of the Lord's Supper, we cannot but fear; but I hope we shall not *deliberately* rebel against God, after devoting ourselves, with so much solemnity, to his service. Oh let us pray earnestly against so great and dangerous a fall! Let us heartily beseech of God that he will grant us the continual help of His Holy Spirit, to purify our hearts, and to sanctify our conduct; that so we may be enabled to commemorate the death of Christ, in his holy ordinance, "to our great and endless comfort;" and that our souls may be strengthened and refreshed with such heavenly vigour, that we may go forth into the world securely armed against all temptations, and that we may evermore bestow our hearts and affections upon that Saviour, who gave his body to be broken, and his blood to be shed, for us miserable and unworthy sinners; upon that Saviour, who alone, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, is worthy of all praise, and worship, honour and adoration, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

# SERMON XXV.

## THE LAST JUDGMENT.

ROMANS xiv. 10.

*We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.*

THE season on which we have this day ntered, is called in the language of our church *Advent,*" which simply means "the coming;" ɔd it is so named, because we are about shortly commemorate the arrival of our blessed ıviour upon earth. But to prepare for that mmemoration is but a small thing, unless we e also prepared for a much more important ıson, the day when our Lord shall come again, t in humility and abasement, as on his first scent to these lower regions, to suffer and to , but in his glorious majesty, to sit in gment on the assembled world. Our best

preparation for the due celebration o
event is, to be in a state of readi
latter, that great crisis of our ete
when the Son of Man, who form
sow his seed, shall return to reap
and shall bind the tares in bundles t
and gather the wheat into his garn
served for ever; when he shall
wicked from among the just, and
into the unquenchable fire of hell, t
other to the endless glory and hap
heavenly kingdom.

It is to this most awful and
subject that I now invite your atten
more highly deserving of the most
sideration that you can bestow upon
Almighty God, by his Holy Spirit,
hearts to thoughtful meditation,
powerful influence impart to my fe
efficacy, which they cannot other
while I endeavour to convince you
importance of being prepared for
and terrible day of the Lord," whe
all stand before the judgment seat o

"We shall all stand before t
seat of Christ!" There is a deep
this assertion; what an immense di
it make in the whole nature and asp

life, and in our estimation of its purpose and value, according as we believe it to be true or false! for true or false it must be; and therefore, since our principles and motives of action, our judgment concerning right and wrong, good and evil, useful and hurtful, the whole bent of our minds, our whole scheme of life, all our desires, all our studies, all our pursuits, our opinion of every circumstance with which our interest and welfare are connected, must of necessity vary with the decision to which we may come on this grand question,—I would willingly suppose that there are none who have not endeavoured to arrive at one conclusion or the other.

Can any man be so senseless as to be indifferent on the subject? To pass it by, without considering it worthy of one single thought? To regard it as a point altogether immaterial, unimportant to his happiness, whether or not he shall be called to account before God hereafter, for the use he has made of this present life? To be unconcerned about the answer to the most momentous question that the mind of man can entertain? Blind and foolish as we are, is there an individual, amongst us all, such an ideot as to say, this is a matter which pertains not to me, which interests me not, which I do not care about, which I will not enquire into? Such a

man should not be suffered to have t
over his own affairs; he should not b
own management or discretion, in a
he should be treated as a helpless,
child; he should be perpetually wat
should take poison instead of whol
he should be led by the hand, lest i
lessness he should stray from the saf
walk over a precipice; he should b
and guarded, lest every moment he sh
himself to danger and ruin. It is t
folly to be regardless, whether there
judgment or not. Were it a mere
question, a question in which the u
only were interested, a man might
not trouble my head about any such
leave it to those who have taste, and
ability for such studies, to decide th
have neither leisure, inclination, n
enough for this sort of enquiry; I mu
the active business of life, which req
care, and industry, and which would
by these fruitless and unprofitable
This would be a seasonable resolution
more than barren knowledge were
view; but the case is very different,
tical question of the highest impo
most comprehensive nature, one that

*practice*, upon which every thing else depends, by which alone the correctness of our views, the expediency of our actions, are to be judged of, and measured, by which alone it can rightly be determined, in any case, whether our desires are good, and our conduct prudent. For surely our opinion on this subject must have the greatest influence upon our whole plan of life; if we have *no* expectation of being judged hereafter, we may do what we please, we may walk in the ways of our hearts, and in the sight of our eyes, without fear or scruple; we may seek our short-lived happiness in whatsoever quarter our imaginations may place it, we may follow the bent of our inclinations in whatsoever direction they may propose to lead us; why should we be checked or thwarted in our course? if we mistake, and are disappointed of the temporary good which we seek, the mistake is of very trivial consequence, life will soon be over, and then we shall be at rest; no future evil will result from our error. But if, on the contrary we *do* expect to be brought into judgment in another world, if we look forwards to a time, when all our past conduct shall undergo a strict scrutiny, and when a sentence of everlasting happiness or misery, shall be passed upon us, according to the issue of that enquiry, our views

of the importance of our conduct must be of quite an opposite character; it can no longer be a matter of indifference what we do, or how we live, or "what manner of persons" we are in our habits of mind, and method of acting; every thing becomes of moment, for every thing will bear some relation to the great reckoning which will conclude and wind up all the affairs of life.

Moreover, it is not a question that concerns only a part of mankind, to the exclusion of the rest,—it is one of personal interest to every individual; for it is said, we shall *all* stand before the judgment seat of Christ. There is no exception therefore; either all will be judged, or none. Some will stand aloof, and look on, as mere spectators, as if the determination of the question were good, and necessary for others, but of no consequence to themselves; they indulge in remarks on their neighbours deficiency, or advancement in religion, without once considering whether it ought to have any influence in their own persons. This is an extravagant delusion; it is as if, when any imminent danger seemed to threaten a crowd of persons, a man should stand still, and amuse himself by observing his companions flying this way and that for safety, and by speculating on their different chances of

escape, while he himself entirely neglects all precautions, and therefore, if the danger really comes, he is sure to be involved in destruction. Do not imitate the senseless behaviour of this foolish man, but reflect that every individual among you has an equal interest in the great question we have in hand. Every one of you, high and low, old or young, has to settle with himself this important point, "Is my existence to terminate for ever in the grave, or is this a life of trial and probation, and shall I appear hereafter before the tribunal of God, to be judged for my whole conduct on the earth? Think not of others, look to yourselves; it is comparatively unimportant to you what the rest may determine, but your own decision is of the most weighty moment, and must influence your whole future life.

I have urged these things for the sake of arousing your attention to the remarks that are about to follow, by convincing you that you are personally concerned in them. It seems strange that it should be necessary to have recourse to such arguments—but yet it *is* necessary; for how many are there, who, while they know this great question of a future judgment to be at stake, yet appear, and in their hearts *are*, utterly indifferent and unconcerned, whether it is determined one

way or the other! How many are
seem to think it does not affect them
will not spare a moment from the pl
business of the world, to devote to
consideration of it! who sport or
through the various paths of life w
turning aside to sit down, and calm
tate on the end for which they were
value of their present time and occu
the destiny which awaits them. Bu
"give ear unto my speech," and "be
careless ones," consider for this one
you have a brief space for reflection,
other employment on your hands to d
attention, that it *is* of importance to
sider whether you have souls or not;
subject worthy of thought, whether
called to account before the judge
kind for the lives which you now lea
a matter which calls for your matu
tion, if you make any pretensions to
ter of reasonable and prudent being
since you know, that "it is appoint
men once to die," there be any truth
sertion that "*after* this" cometh
ment." For, as I have said before,
must needs acknowledge, your decisi
ing this question must affect and inf

whole lives; by it will be determined whether your present views and conduct be wise and right, or at least indifferent, or whether it be quite immaterial that you live as you do, devoted to the world, and studious of your temporal welfare alone, or whether such conduct be pregnant with sin and danger, entirely opposed to your truest interests, and tending to the certain and eternal ruin both of your souls and bodies.

I shall not waste the time in arguing the question with you, whether there *will* be a day of judgment or not; all religion, you know, is founded upon the supposition that there will be. The Holy Scriptures, which contain *our* religion, most explicitly assert it; and therefore there can be no other way of *debating* the matter, than by enquiring into the truth and divine inspiration of the Bible, which it is quite foreign from my present purpose to do. I am only asking what your own decision, your own belief is, and I have reminded you that the whole character of *your* life must correspond with your opinion. Well then, how have you decided? What do you actually believe? No longer hesitate, or be *undetermined*, but come to some deliberate conclusion, and let the world see that your conviction, one way or the other, is sincere, and your *principles* fixed. There are but two modes of

life set before you, and they are dir
to each other; one of these must
right, and the other wrong; you wi
in your choice by the belief which
concerning a judgment to come. L
these two modes of life are, and w
you can reasonably adopt.

It is with aversion that I ente
scription of the sort of life which
requires that you should lead, if
cidedly of opinion, that the doctrine
judgment is false. But yet I will
sake of shaming those who live as
their opinion, and of convincing
whatever belief they may profess, t
respect to be distinguished from unb

If such as I have supposed be
persuasion, you will of course "live
in the world." It may not be a ne
sequence that you should deny his
perhaps the wonders of creation,
cannot shut your eyes, will overpo
proofs to the contrary; but you wi
deny it, that is, the belief of it will h
upon you; you will not praise Him,
love Him, you will not fear Him,
put your trust in Him, you will not
with any sense of your dependance

ness for protection, you will not desire to know His will or to serve Him, your *hearts* will not acknowledge Him, in your whole conduct there will be no reference to Him.

And as you will live without God in the world, so you will live as if you had no souls within you. No hope of heaven will encourage you, no fear of hell will alarm you; your views will be confined to this short life, you will desire and pursue only worldly pleasures and advantages, such as riches, and power, and fame, and learning, and the rest of the transitory and unsatisfactory possessions which can be obtained on earth. But of these you will set your heart chiefly on wealth, for the sake of the luxuries of life, which by its means can be procured, which consist of such contemptible things as sumptuous fare, rich clothing, handsome dwellings, sensual enjoyments, trifling amusements, and whatever else can administer to the empty vanity, the haughty pride, and the base lusts of human nature. Earthly happiness will be your utmost aim, and therefore you must accept it from such sources as earth can lay open to you; and if she has nothing better to offer than the gifts I have mentioned, you must be content with her meagre allowance, nay, you must put up with pleasures inferior to, though of the same low nature with,

those which the very brutes enjoy, if you think that, like them, you have only bodies, and you make your happiness to consist in the indulgence of the same animal desires and appetites as they do.

The consequence of your worshipping no God, and believing that you have no souls, will be, that you will not be disturbed by any thoughts of sin. For if you suppose that God takes no cognizance of human affairs, and that there will be no enquiry into your conduct at any future time, but that you shall perish in the dust, and never more appear after this span of life is come to a close, if this is your creed, to you there can be no sin, no offence against God, to torment you with the fear of evil consequences. In this case, there is to you *no* forbidden fruit, of which it is said, " in the day ye eat thereof ye shall surely die." You may freely eat of the fruit of all the trees in this garden of the world—there are no other restrictions than such as you choose to put upon yourselves, for your own present convenience. As long as you do not commit crimes that would expose you to the vengeance of the human law, you may, upon *your* principles, slacken the reins of all your passions and desires, and wanton in unbridled licentiousness. Nothing need check you but the fear of destroying by

excess, the very means and sources of your enjoyment, by injuring your health, or exhausting your property; for as to *character*, the world will be very lenient towards you, or if you should be fearful of its disapprobation, you can easily escape this, by covering your practices with the shade of secrecy.

With such opinions as I have supposed, of course, if you profess *any* religion, it will be mere *profession;*—you will attend only to the outward forms of it, which will lay upon you no heavy burthen, or severe restraints; and these forms you will observe, only because brought up from childhood in that habit, or because it is your general custom, and you are fearful of exciting observation, by appearing singular; or from deliberate hypocrisy, and a desire to obtain a better name than you really deserve; or because possibly you think religion a very useful scheme for preserving order amongst men, and therefore you are willing to lend it the support of your countenance and example. One or more of these will be your motives for keeping up some show of religion, and paying external respect to its ordinances.

I have thus briefly described what, in some of its most prominent features, will be the character of those who believe, and *act consistently*

*with their belief*, that there will be no day of judgment hereafter. But have I herein described no others? Is there no man here present, whose conscience will tell him that although he is by no means a declared or decided unbeliever, although he professes to entertain, and thinks that he really does entertain, the expectation of future retribution, yet that I have exactly represented his own case?

I have here given you a description, which I purposely so expressed, as to include many a nominal Christian; many a man who would be offended, and think it unjust, and uncharitable, if he were called an unbeliever. I will then, for a moment, take upon me an office which properly belongs to your own consciences; and questioning you on this subject, and holding up to your view the portrait which I have drawn, I will ask, Is there no man here who perceives in the picture a great resemblance to himself? Is there no one here present, who, like the unbeliever before described, "*lives without God in the world?* that is, lives without any practical acknowledgment of Him? who has no love for Him? feels no dependance on Him? never prays to Him? never lives as in His sight? does nothing with a view to His favour? omits nothing through fear of His displeasure? makes no refcrence to His will in

any of his actions? conducts his whole life, as if there were no God in existence, or as if He took no notice of man and his proceedings? Again—Is there no one among you, who lives as if he had *no immortal soul* within him to care and provide for? who has not a serious hope or fear on the subject of eternity? who bestows all his anxiety and industry on the welfare and gratification of his body, and on the good things (as they are falsely called) of this world only? whose spiritual interests are entirely neglected, while his temporal concerns are prosecuted with persevering zeal and activity? who treats the world as his home, and never looks forward to, or prepares for, any future state of existence?

Moreover, is there no one of you all, who has *no conviction of sin?* no dread of its guilt—no apprehension of the danger to which it exposes him—makes no endeavours, entertains no desire to avoid it? on whom no motive operates to the restraining of his passions, and the moderating of his indulgences, except the fear of human law, or a regard for his character, or the care of his health, or some other prudential consideration of a temporal nature?

Lastly, is there no one who puts on the external show, and makes the profession of religion from some unworthy motive, while he is

altogether uninfluenced by the power, and dead to the spirit of it? who is not humbled by a sense of his sins? has no lively faith in a Redeemer? feels no need of spiritual aid? finds no enjoyment in prayer? has no real love of God? entertains no earnest desire for Christian holiness and purity? is not disposed to forego the world, and to mortify the flesh? does not dwell in heart and hope on the happiness of heaven? Who even despises and reproaches those who *have* a lively sense of the importance of religion, and seriously cultivate it in their hearts and lives? who ridicules what he thinks the folly, and dislikes the society of truly pious Christians? who sets down their serious conversation for specious pretence—their devout feelings for wild delusions of the brain—their abstinence from worldly enjoyments for natural dulness and insensibility to pleasure—their grave demeanour for morose austerity—their holy lives for a hypocritical affectation of sanctity?

My brethren, if there is such a person as this in the visible church (as I fear there are many), though he declares and imagines that he entertains a belief of the Christian doctrines, in what does he materially differ from the unbelievers before described? How is he better prepared to stand before the judgment seat of Christ?

What better hope has he of a favourable issue, when his cause comes to be pleaded before that awful tribunal? Who will undertake to plead such a desperate cause? Who will stand forward as the advocate of such a graceless sinner? Where will he procure evidence in his behalf? The great accuser of mankind will of course condemn him with malicious triumph at his hopeless condition. But more than this, the Scriptures will condemn him; his whole life will rise up in judgment against him; his very conscience will call for punishment upon him; his judge, who might have been his redeemer, will condemn him.

What shall you do, therefore, that you may avoid the dreadful sentence which will be passed upon this miserable man? I will answer you in language of the highest authority, in the very words of Him before whom you will hereafter appear as your judge—"Watch ye, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all those things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." Watchfulness and prayer are the two great duties which our blessed Saviour frequently enjoins upon his disciples; and the necessity of these is strikingly illustrated in the conduct of the apostles in the garden of Gethsemane. If they had watched and

prayed, they would not all have so fearfully forsaken him and fled, nor would Peter so basely have denied him. Watch therefore, that ye may not fall into an indolent carelessness about your spiritual safety; that you may be always on the alert, and at your post; "not slothful" in your religious duties, but "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;" that you may make the most active use of your brief and precious time allowed you for working out your salvation, and that you may improve all the merciful opportunities of grace vouchsafed to you for that purpose; that you may "work the work of Him who sent you" into the world, "while it is day," and the light of the gospel shines around you, and within you, "lest the night come, in which no man can work;" that the Devil, of whose "devices" there is great need that you be "not ignorant," deceive you not by his subtilty; that your hearts be not corrupted by the allurements of sin, to betray you into a snare; that sudden temptation do not surprise you, in an unguarded moment; that you "fall" not, when you too presumptuously "think that you stand" securely; that you neglect not, like the foolish virgins, to provide oil for your lamps, before the bridegroom knocks at the door; that "your hearts be not overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness,

and cares of this life, and so the hour of death, and the " day of judgment " come upon you unawares ; for as a snare it shall come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.

But this is only *one* part of your duty.— " Pray always " while you watch ; " watch unto prayer," as the apostle expresses it ; watching alone will be quite ineffectual ; it may prevent your being overtaken by surprise, but it will not save you from being overcome by force. He who watches without prayer, is like a soldier, who is standing indeed at his post, but without his armour, and therefore an easy victim to a feeble enemy ; but he who watches *with* prayer, is like " a strong man armed, who keepeth his palace, and (then) his goods are in peace," and cannot be taken from him. My brethren, be ever earnest in prayer ; " continue instant " in supplication, for the most necessary aid of the Holy Spirit. If they were the last words I was permitted to address to you, I could not leave you a more important admonition, or one more expressive of my desire for your salvation. This help is indispensable to your success in your Christian warfare. You cannot yourselves *perceive* the full extent to which it is required ; " the enemy cometh on so fast," with such power and such wiles, your flesh is so weak, your hearts are so

deceitful, the world so abounds in temptations, that you have need of "the whole armour of God,"—of the mighty protection of a spirit stronger than the "prince of the power of the air," able to defend you against all the assaults of your restless adversaries, the world, the flesh, and the devil combined. "Pray therefore without ceasing"—"Pray always, and faint not"—"Pray always, with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watch thereunto with all perseverance." You see how urgent the Scriptures are on this subject, and with good reason; for God only can save you, and He will only help you in proportion to your prayers. As long as you lift your hands and hearts to heaven, you will prevail; when you begin to relax, you will grow faint and feeble; if you leave off altogether, you will be overcome and ruined.

My brethren, attend for one moment longer. Worthy, or unworthy, before this Son of Man, seated on the throne of judgment, we shall *all* one day stand—there is no way of escaping it. It has pleased God to send us into this life of trial, and to him we must account for the use of it. It will not do to hide our talent in the earth, with the vain intention of restoring it hereafter to Him who gave it us, and saying, "Lo, there thou hast that is thine;" still less safe will it be to misuse

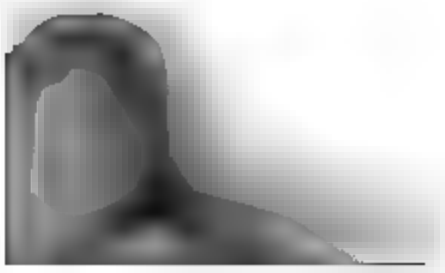
it. It must be *improved;* it *may* be improved (according to the gracious design of the giver) to our eternal advantage; if neglected, or abused, it will be to our eternal loss and harm.

What is it most prudent to do then? Shall we go and lay it out upon our follies and vices? Shall we fritter and trifle away our invaluable time, which is hastening on while *we* delay, and every moment of which is bringing us insensibly, but with most steady progress, nearer and nearer to death and judgment, in idle pleasures, or in unprofitable industry in earthly cares, or in the ruinous indulgence of our sinful desires, when we are on the very brink of the bottomless pit of perdition, and know not how soon God may be "wearied with our iniquities," and suffer us to fall into the ruin which we would not avoid? Would this be wise? Is it not rather "high time to awaken out of sleep, to cast away the works of darkness, and to put upon us the armour of light," since "the night is so far spent, and the day so near at hand?" Is it not better to set at nought, and to despise the whole world, and its momentary enjoyments and advantages, than to sacrifice our souls for such an empty possession, such an unsubstantial and fugitive happiness? Is it not better to "provide for ourselves bags that wax not old, a treasure in heaven that fail-

eth not," than to heap up riches on the earth, which we can carry no further than the grave, wherein we may be laid before a few days shall have passed over our heads? Is it not better to "sow unto the spirit, that of the spirit we may reap everlasting life," than "to sow unto the flesh, and of the flesh to reap (nothing but) corruption" and ruin? Is not *this* the wisest thing that we can do, by God's help so to employ the brief span of time that is granted to us, that we may be happy to all eternity?

O "God, give us all a right understanding" in this most important matter! Oh, put it into our hearts to make this prudent resolution, and impart to us both the will and the power to fulfil it! Pardon, for Christ's sake, our former shameful and dangerous neglect of the inestimable opportunities of grace and salvation! Enable us to "redeem the time!" Conduct us safely, by the guidance of thy Holy Spirit, through the trials and temptations of our remaining days. Help us to persevere in repentance, and faith and hope, and holiness, even "unto the end." And after we shall have "passed through" the grave and gate of death," raise us up again to meet our great redeemer, when "he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth!" Finally, render us worthy to be placed on his right hand, at the

*final* separation of the wicked and the just; that we may be addressed in those blessed and joyful words of approbation and acceptance, "Well *done*, good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord!"

EXETER:

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